

Two Gentlemen of Dubuque

L E L A N D L. S A G E

In a recently published *Guide to Research Collections of Former United States Senators 1789-1982*, notice is taken of the collections of papers of Iowa's long-time senator, William Boyd Allison, who served from 1873 until his death in 1908. The first listing is rightly given to the vast corpus of papers housed in the Dodge Room of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives in Des Moines. Other scattered items are described; then appears the following entry:

Papers

University of Iowa

Iowa City, IA

Papers: 1895-1916

3 feet

Correspondence, clippings, bills

Detailed guide available from repository¹

A discerning reader's curiosity would very likely be aroused by the similarity between the descriptions of the Des Moines and Iowa City collections, which differ mainly as to quantity and dates. How did it happen that the renowned senator's papers were divided? By what routes did one batch of his papers end up in the possession of the State Historical Department and one with the Special Collections of The University of Iowa Libraries? One might expect the owners of a politician's papers to make a gift or sale of his important papers to the state which had given him ten victories and only one defeat in eleven electoral contests. How did some of the collection ultimately come to be donated elsewhere, in this case to The University of Iowa, with which he had no ties of alma mater?² As one

The author would like to thank Mrs. Margaret Lacy Zimansky of Iowa City, Mary E. Richards of Dubuque, and Howard V. Jones of Cedar Falls for their assistance.

¹*Guide to Research Collections of Former United States Senators 1789-1982* (Washington, D.C., Historical Office of United States Senate, 1983), 5.

²Allison attended Allegheny College (Preparatory Department), Meadville, Pennsylvania, in 1848-49 and Western Reserve College in Hudson, Ohio, 1850-51.

dives into these questions, it becomes apparent that the answers lie in certain personal relationships between Allison and others, and that chance played a role in determining the ultimate destinations of the two collections.

For the uninitiated, perhaps the importance of the senator's papers needs to be demonstrated. What kind of senator was Allison and why are his papers important and highly prized? No one could say that William Boyd Allison was a man of powerful and seminal ideas which determined the course of the nation's history. After 43 years in Congress only one piece of legislation bears his name, and even that one, the Bland-Allison Act of 1878, is in partnership with another.³ Two other highly important pieces of legislation to which he made vital contributions were the Senate Report advocating a commission form of government for the District of Columbia,⁴ containing the germ of the idea for the now-familiar commission type of municipal government, and the Railroad Rate Act of 1906.⁵ He was, however, an "effective" legislator and one of the four recognized leaders (some might say "bosses") of the Senate, along with Aldrich of Rhode Island, Platt of Connecticut, and Spooner of Wisconsin. Although not inclined to throw his weight about, or to engage in flights of spread-eagle oratory, Allison spoke clearly and to the point, much like an accountant making a presentation to a board of directors. He might well be described as a negotiator whose best work was done in the cloak rooms and conference rooms, where he could be mightily persuasive. He was a party stalwart, for years chairman of the Republican conference, a caucusing group, with a decisive voice in the selection of committee members. He was for many years a member of the powerful Senate Committee on Finance, often a policy-making body, whose decisions he could help put into effect as chairman of the Committee on Appropriations.

In his day, long before the machinery of finance created by the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921, the decisions made by him and his colleagues virtually controlled the purse strings of the nation's treasury. In a sense they made up a budget on a day-to-day basis as the congressional session ran its course. No important legislation requiring funding could be implemented without the approval of Allison's committee and their counterparts in the House. Those projects which received approval were funded;

³*Congressional Record*, 45 Cong., 2 Sess., 1285, 1410, 1418-20; Leland L. Sage, *William Boyd Allison: A Study in Practical Politics* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1956), 151-57.

⁴Sage, *Allison*, 129-30; *Senate Report 453*, 43 Cong., 1 Sess.

⁵Sage, *Allison*, 296-305 and notes 10-39; John M. Blum, "Theodore Roosevelt and the Hepburn Act: Toward an Orderly System of Control," in Elting E. Morison (ed.), *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951-54), VI, Appendix 11, 1558-71. Herein he argues that the key provision of the bill should be called the "Allison Amendment."

if a shortfall appeared later, correction was possible by a catchall deficiency appropriation bill near the end of the session. In these matters some committee members were all too willing to shirk their responsibilities and "let Mr. Allison take care of it." Obviously, this was no way to run a government; one wonders why the Budget Act was so long in coming.⁶

That the old system worked as well as it did was in large part a tribute to the zeal and industry and honesty of Senator Allison. A childless widower after two marriages, he maintained a modest social life in Dubuque and Washington, but he found real pleasure and satisfaction only in the work of "his" committee. He literally slaved over the details of the appropriation bills—and seemed to love every minute of it. His voluminous correspondence is replete with the pleas of highly placed people for his favor and for the approval of their projects; bankers, manufacturers, railroad magnates, merchants, generals, and admirals sought his vote and his blessing on their plans.

If the importance of the Allison papers may now be accepted, and it seems impossible to doubt our good fortune that such papers exist, questions inevitably arise as to the provenance of each collection. Although the chief concern here is with The University of Iowa collection, the fact that a larger set was given at an earlier point in time to the State of Iowa and housed in the State Historical Building, must make up the first part of this account.

The prime mover in the business of getting the Senator's papers placed in Des Moines was General Grenville Mellen Dodge of Council Bluffs, Iowa, and New York City. The doughty general had become a legendary figure of Civil War fame as a destroyer of Confederate railroads and more famous as a postwar locator of railroad routes to the Pacific and organizer of railroad corporations. In the process he had amassed a fortune generally estimated at over three million dollars, a considerable sum by the standards of that day, and had developed the characteristic of riding roughshod over those who stood in his way.⁷

As a longtime political ally of Allison and personal friend and business associate, Dodge had a pardonable and commendable interest in wanting to see Allison's papers preserved for posterity. Shortly after Allison's death in August 1908, Dodge, in close cooperation with Edgar Rubey Harlan, curator of the State Historical Museum and Archives in Des Moines,

⁶On the importance of the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 see Fritz M. Marx, "The Bureau of the Budget: Its Evolution and Present Role," *American Political Science Review* 39 (August-October 1945), 653-84, 869-98.

⁷Stanley P. Hirshson, *Grenville Mellen Dodge: Soldier, Politician, Railroad Pioneer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), is the best general biography of Dodge. Also see Wallace D. Farnham, "Grenville Dodge and the Union Pacific: A Study of Historical Legends," *Journal of American History* 51 (March 1965), 632-50.

began a drive to collect the Senator's papers and have them housed in Des Moines as a gift to the state. Allison himself had made no specific provision for the preservation of his papers. One way or another Dodge learned that some of Allison's papers were in the possession of Judge Benjamin W. Lacy of Dubuque, and, of course, Dodge knew of Allison's papers and other effects in the home at Dubuque and the Washington residence, both under the care and supervision of Mrs. Jennie A. Brayton, a family friend who had for years presided over Allison's domiciles. On December 4, 1908, just four months to the day after Allison's death, General Dodge wrote to Curator Harlan: "I have had communication with Judge Lacy about Senator Allison's papers. I know Senator Allison intended they should go to the Aldrich [Harlan's predecessor as curator] Collection . . . All of Allison's papers and everything he had in his house were turned over to Mrs. Brayton [1853-1925] during her life. She then has disposition of them, so there will be two lots of them, those that are under Judge Lacy, and those that are subject to Mrs. Brayton's orders. I hope they will both conclude to put them with you, but what evidence you have you should send to Judge Lacy. That would settle the question, I think."⁸

Intentions to favor the Aldrich Collection there may have been, but action was missing. (It must be remembered that we are dealing with elderly men, full of infirmities, and naive as to matters of archival science.) This much we know from a search of the Aldrich Collection: there was no commitment on the part of Allison to place his papers at Des Moines.

Meanwhile, General Dodge, admirably concerned over the Allison papers as he was, was also understandably eager to have a safe resting place for his own enormous collection of papers and memorabilia. These he had weeded out and had copied over a period of years and sent them along to Curator Harlan, at the same time making arrangements for a biographer to do his life story.⁹ When he died on January 3, 1916, he had the satisfaction of knowing that his memory would be perpetuated.

⁸Dodge to Edgar R. Harlan, December 4, 1908, Harlan Correspondence, Dodge File, Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines. Dodge would surely have known Judge Lacy as a mutual friend of Allison.

⁹Hirshson, *Dodge*, xi-xii, 256-59, 262; *Annals of Iowa* (3) 12 (October 1920), 467-68; 14 (October 1923), 146-48. Dodge's first choice to write his biography was James S. Clarkson, former editor of the *Iowa State Register* (now *Des Moines Register*). Clarkson accepted the invitation, but, in failing health, wilted before even starting on the project. Meanwhile, Dodge's own health was also declining because of the ravages of cancer. In their haste the family selected Jacob R. Perkins, minister of the First Congregational Church of Council Bluffs. Perkins was a man of letters and a novelist of sorts, but only slightly qualified for the gigantic task of coping with a man of such important associations and a period of history so complex. The resulting work, to which Edgar R. Harlan made valuable contributions, *Trails, Rails, and War: The Life of General G. M. Dodge* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1929), is full of errors and misinterpretations.

By this time Allison's papers were also on their way to a similar resting place. Even before the month was up after Dodge's death, Harlan could write to a friend: "I have just received the personal papers of Senator Allison, contained in eighteen large shipping boxes. I have some twenty-two boxes from General Grenville M. Dodge, and sixteen from Major John F. Lacey. The letters of Gen. James S. Clarkson are on the way from New York to me, and should be here today . . ." ¹⁰ Harlan thought of them as the spiritual essence of those whom he considered "the old guard"; for a new generation they would be the materials of sober history. Countless numbers of researchers and casual students of Iowa history and American history have made use of them since 1925.

The explanation of the placing of another smaller yet important batch of Allison papers at The University of Iowa is a more involved story. In 1908 General Dodge, as we have seen, was aware that Judge Benjamin W. Lacy of Dubuque, a close associate of Senator Allison, had possession of some Allison papers, but for reasons not now clear because of gaps in the correspondence, Judge Lacy did not put his holdings at the disposal of General Dodge and Curator Harlan for the benefit of the Des Moines collection. It is a matter of more than idle curiosity to wonder how a sizable batch of the Senator's papers came into Judge Lacy's possession. The answer would seem to lie in the realm of a very special relationship between the venerable gentleman from Dubuque and Judge Lacy, his much younger friend and fellow townsman. Who, then, was this Judge Lacy, and how did his friendship with Senator Allison come about?

Judge Lacy was a lawyer and banker and an owner of considerable property in Dubuque and elsewhere, a highly esteemed public-spirited citizen of the Key City, and, especially germane to this story, the man chosen by the Senator to serve as the executor and trustee by will of his estate. Although the two were separated by a gulf of 20 years in age, their friendship, dating back to 1870, had not suffered because of this, indeed, it had grown through the years. It began when Allison was nearing the end of his fourth term in the House of Representatives and near the time of his defeat by Judge George Grover Wright for the Republican nomination

¹⁰Edgar R. Harlan to Rollin Wilson, Fairfield, Iowa, January 22, 1916, Harlan Correspondence. These Allison Papers would have been the ones General Dodge alluded to as being in the care of Mrs. Brayton. I have not been able to document Mrs. Brayton's belated decision to surrender the papers to the Iowa State Historical Department. As to the James S. Clarkson letters, Curator Harlan would have been disappointed if he had known he was getting only a fragment of Clarkson's total correspondence. Another portion would go to the Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, and, years later, another batch would come to the Des Moines institution, the gift of Elizabeth Clarkson Zwart, James S. Clarkson's grandniece. In addition, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of uncollected items are scattered through the collected correspondence of many notables in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.

for the Senate. As a virtually penniless young school teacher from the Lima community in Fayette County in northeast Iowa, the son of an unsuccessful country doctor, young Lacy had been invited in 1868 by a distinguished relative, Judge Westel Willoughby¹¹ of Alexandria, Virginia, to come east and live with him and study law in his office. This he had done, but after a year or so he had secured a position in the Bureau of the Census as a clerk, moved into Washington, and continued his law studies on the side, receiving his law degree from the Columbian School of Law in 1871.¹²

At some time during these student days in Washington he had been introduced to Congressman Allison as a constituent and as a relative of Judge Willoughby. A friendship was born which was to develop and mature. It was Allison who advised young Lacy to go to Dubuque after his graduation and seek a place in a law firm there. Armed with an introduction from the influential senator-elect, who had just defeated the incumbent James Harlan with the help of General Dodge, Jacob Rich, ex-Governor Kirkwood, and others,¹³ and piloted around town by Colonel David B. Henderson¹⁴ (Allison's Man Friday in Dubuque), and at times by Allison himself, Lacy found that doors were freely opened to him, but solid connections were hard to come by. After many disappointing interviews he was finally given a clerkship in the office of Adams & Robinson,¹⁵ one of the leading law firms in the city. Hard work, keen initiative, and native intellectual brilliance were rewarded in a few years by admission into membership in the firm, marriage to partner Robinson's daughter, an appointment as district judge, and later a place as counsel to and then presi-

¹¹Judge Westel Willoughby (1831-1897) was a major in the 137th New York volunteers until severely wounded at Chancellorsville. After the war he located in Alexandria, Virginia, and practiced law. Reconstruction politics led to an appointment to the Supreme Court of Virginia, hence his title of Judge. After a brief tenure he returned to private practice in Alexandria and Washington, and a post as lecturer in law in the Columbian School of Law (see note 12). *Washington Post*, December 23, 1897, p. 12, c. 2.

¹²This summary is based on information in the Benjamin W. Lacy diary, in the possession of Mrs. Margaret Lacy Zimansky, Iowa City, Iowa, his granddaughter, who kindly permitted me to make use of it. An annotated edition of the diary is now being prepared by the author of this article. The Columbian School of Law became a part of Columbian University when that institution was formed in 1873; renamed George Washington University in 1904.

¹³Sage, *Allison*, 91-118, summarizes Allison's loss to George G. Wright in 1870 and the victory over Harlan in 1872. Jacob Rich was publisher-editor of the *Dubuque Times*.

¹⁴Colonel David B. Henderson, later to be a member of the House of Representatives (1883-1903) and speaker (1899-1903). He would have found much in common with young Lacy. Both had lived in Fayette County, Iowa, and both had attended Upper Iowa University in Fayette. See Sage, *Allison*, *passim*, especially 48, 169, 185, 293; Willard L. Hoing, "David Bremner Henderson: Speaker of the House," *Iowa Journal of History* 55 (January 1957): 1-34.

¹⁵Austin Adams (1826-1890) was the dean of the Dubuque bar; he served on the Supreme Court of Iowa for 12 years, twice as chief justice. Frank M. Robinson (1828-1885), a Vermonter by birth, came to Iowa in 1857. The Adams-Robinson firm was founded in 1862.

dent of one of the largest banks in the city.¹⁶ The continuing friendship, so deeply rooted in gratitude and admiration, took on even more meaning when Allison asked Lacy to become his personal attorney.

In 1907 Allison was challenged by the brilliant Progressive Republican governor of Iowa, Albert Baird Cummins, for the Republican nomination for senator, to be decided in a preferential primary in June 1908. At great sacrifice Judge Lacy yielded to Allison's plea that he take a place on the Committee of Seven, headed by their fellow townsman, John T. Adams,¹⁷ to lead and guide Allison's campaign for the nomination. Lacy went to Council Bluffs for the launching of the candidacy, where the peerless orator, Senator Jonathan Prentiss Dolliver, addressed a large assemblage of the faithful. One may be sure that Judge Lacy was able to overcome a pronounced distaste for public participation in this sort of political duel-to-the-death, barely a step above rabble-rousing, only because of his everlasting gratitude to Senator Allison for his help in getting him his first law office placement and because of the long-ensuing friendship. He played the part of a good soldier and fought the heated battle of 1908 as a good Allisonian. Tradition carried the day and Allison narrowly won the nomination—but in two months he was dead from the cancer which should have precluded his candidacy in the first place.¹⁸

Judge Lacy was deeply touched by the Senator's death. In his diary he made the following entry:

Senator Allison died on Tuesday, August 4th. He would have been eighty years old next March . . . [nearly forty-four years in Congress]. I had been personally acquainted with him about forty years, and for many years had known him well, and of late years I had felt a strong friendship for him, which was, I think, in considerable measure returned. During recent summers, when he was at home, we met very frequently at the Iowa Trust & Savings Bank—often daily—and I had long visits with him there. His personality was exceedingly attractive to me . . . After all that has been said and written of him, it is useless for me to attempt to add anything, except that his death is a real personal loss and sorrow to me.

By his will, which was drawn by his attorney in Washington two years ago last April, he named me as sole executor and trustee without bond.¹⁹

¹⁶Iowa Trust and Savings Bank, organized in 1884 by one of Allison's dearest friends and most capable political managers, Jacob Rich, and others. Probably the heaviest stockholder was Henry L. Stout, a wealthy lumberman whose principal holdings were in Wisconsin. Lacy succeeded Stout as president in 1902 and served until his death in 1912. Allison was a small stockholder.

¹⁷John Taylor Adams (1862-1939), a wealthy lumber retailer in Dubuque, an amateur in politics, entered this campaign as his first venture into state politics. He advanced rapidly from amateur to professional and soon was operating on a national scale.

¹⁸Sage, *Allison*, 313-332.

¹⁹Lacy diary, entry for August 16, 1908.

Judge Lacy soon found himself with another assignment: he was the designee to finish the legal work necessary for carrying out Allison's role as executor of his own wife's estate, hanging fire since her death by suicide in 1883, and also the estate of Mrs. Allison's aunt, Mrs. James W. Grimes, who had died in 1890. These tasks were to run on for several years before they could be completed.

In October 1908, in his capacity as executor of Allison's estate, Judge Lacy and his wife journeyed to Washington to attend to some of the details related to settling Allison's affairs, including the disposal of Allison's house at 1124 Vermont Avenue. In his diary Mr. Lacy described the task.

We remained a week in Washington stopping at the Arlington. We worked diligently the entire week in examining and inventorying the contents of Senator Allison's residence, and selecting for shipment to Dubuque a considerable part of the furnishings, excluding the furniture and carpets. One forenoon I spent at the rooms of the Senate Committee on Appropriations *in looking over Mr. Allison's papers and belongings there* [italics mine].

The next allusion to this legal responsibility appears a few weeks later, when Lacy was back in Dubuque.

I have been extremely busy for several weeks in preparing reports on behalf of Mr. Allison, executor and trustee, at the time of his death, of the Estate of Mrs. Allison and various trusts under her will, and as trustee of Mrs. Grimes' will. It has been tedious and perplexing work. All of the reports are now about ready to submit to the Courts at Burlington and here.

Only one more reference to the Allison matter appears in the diary. Under date of February 12, 1909, a meaningful statement is made.

Two weeks ago, after a somewhat strenuous day at the office, spent with outside attorneys in settling one of Allison's trust matters, I came home feeling very tired, with a rapid pulse, pain in my side and shoulders, and knocked out generally . . . I seem to have gotten a little over-stretched, and the heart seems to show some slight irregularity in its action. I have been spurred a trifle by this incident . . . [to retire].

As the following pages of the diary reveal, full retirement would never become a reality, although the major burden of his firm's business was assumed by his partners, Glenn Brown²⁰ and his son, Frank Robinson Lacy.²¹ Family matters, attention to his large personal property holdings,

²⁰Glenn Brown (1858-1935), Judge Lacy's partner in the firm of Lacy, Brown & Lacy.

²¹Frank Robinson Lacy (1881-1965). He received his A.B. degree in 1902 from Harvard and continued there as a law student, but withdrew because of ill health. He then read law in his father's office, passed the Iowa bar examination, and entered the firm on August 1, 1906.

extra work at the bank of which he was president, travel, reading, and petty illnesses consumed most of his time and energy. Under date of August 26, 1910, he refers to a "constant numbness, with some prickly feeling, and at times a feeling of fullness and heat" in the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. This disappeared with therapy. On March 12, 1911, he refers to his sixty-second birthday, his apparent good health, his ability to turn out work without fatigue, but at the same time a great desire to take life easier, to "take in sail," voluntarily, not from absolute necessity.²²

The diary closes rather abruptly on July 14, 1912, and death followed on September 28, 1912. In his will his wife, May Robinson Lacy, was named executrix of his estate, and Glenn Brown, his dear friend and law partner, was named "administrator with will annexed" as the person to finish the legalities inherent in the execution of William Boyd Allison's will. In her unwanted role of executrix, Mrs. May R. Lacy handed over to Glenn Brown the various documents and properties belonging to the Allison estate, only one item in her report to the court being of relevance to this essay.

Said administrator with will annexed has also receipted to me and I have delivered to him *a quantity of old papers having no pecuniary value but which it is thought best to preserve for future reference if required and said receipt is hereto attached*²³ [italics added].

This cold and formal legal statement very likely contains the key to the answer to the question: By what route, however circuitous, did a considerable body of Allison papers come into the possession of the Lacy family? In the absence of written documents attesting gift and transfer, not likely ever to be found if, indeed, such documents ever existed, the only possible assumption must be that in all likelihood these are the papers which Judge Lacy found in Allison's committee room (which General Dodge alluded to in his letter to Curator Harlan on December 4, 1908, quoted above) that they were retained by Benjamin W. Lacy as a friend and in his capacity as executor and trustee of the Allison estate; that after his (Lacy's) death in 1912 they were passed to his wife, May R. Lacy, who thought of them as "a quantity of old papers having no pecuniary value," but, nevertheless, worth preserving for the time being. From her they went to Glenn Brown, administrator with will annexed of the Benjamin W. Lacy affairs related to said Lacy's role as executor of Allison's estate. For some time they were retained for safekeeping in the offices of Brown, Lacy & Clewell. At some future date Glenn Brown passed the body of Allison papers back to the Lacys in the person of Frank R. Lacy, his own law partner and May R.

²²Lacy diary.

²³"Final Report to the District Court," by May R. Lacy; copy in Allison Papers, The University of Iowa Libraries.

Lacy's son. When Lacy retired about 1958 he took the Allison papers and all other personal papers to his Dubuque home. In 1960 he brought many of his books and papers, *including the Allison papers* (italics mine), to the home of his daughter, Mrs. Margaret Lacy Zimansky, in Iowa City. The Allison papers and many of his books were left in her possession at the time of his death in 1965. After some years of caring for them, she decided to place the papers in a depository where they would be available for the use of qualified scholars. On the advice of friends she chose the Special Collections Department of The University of Iowa Libraries as a proper place for this purpose.²⁴ The gift was made as of September 17, 1968.²⁵

²⁴Information from Mrs. Margaret Lacy Zimansky. In addition to the papers of Senator Allison described in this essay, the Department of Special Collections at The University of Iowa Libraries presently holds major collections of papers of the following U.S. Senators from Iowa: Dick Clark, John C. Culver, Lester J. Dickinson, Clyde L. Herring, and Harold E. Hughes. On pages 334-335 of the *Guide to Research Collections of Former United States Senators* (see note 1 above) will be found the names of 22 additional Senators from Iowa whose papers are presently represented by smaller collections in The University of Iowa Libraries.

²⁵See "Consignment of Papers" to the State University of Iowa, The University of Iowa Libraries, dated September 17, 1968, a legal document attached to the Allison Papers at Iowa City.