

THE COPPERHEADS OF IOWA: A RE-EXAMINATION

By Robert Rutland

Despite the passage of almost a century, a stereotype of the Iowa Copperhead continues to exist. Students of the Civil War cannot fail to be impressed with the "fire in the rear" alluded to by so many historians of that conflict. A study of the problem of loyalty and disaffection during the years 1861-1865 in Iowa offers promise, because the story of the Copperheads — the "Peace Democrats" — of Iowa does not exactly conform with the common conception of the Midwestern Copperhead movement. Iowa Copperheads had, in common with their Midwestern brethren, an aversion to a stronger federal system and an agrarian distrust of the mushrooming industrialism in the East. But whereas the Copperheads of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were able to elect men to Congress, control legislatures, and even threaten to sweep an entire ticket of offices, the Iowa Copperhead was a feeble voice in state politics. Denied a single congressional seat, narrowed to a handful of supporters in the General Assembly, and at times unable to present firm candidates for the governorship, the Copperheads of Iowa reached a wretched political level. Why, then, is the Copperhead significant in Iowa history?

Consider the Iowa setting in 1861. Her inhabitants had come from New England and the South, from the middle Atlantic region, and from the neighboring states. Portions of Iowa were still a part of the raw frontier, and beyond her western boundaries there stretched more than a thousand miles of plains, mountains, and desert. Politically, the majority of this amalgam of people had cast their lot with the newly formed Republican party at the state and national level. Slavery was forbidden within her borders. A historic decision clarifying the status of the Negro in Iowa had been made in 1839, when Democrat Charles Mason sat on the territorial supreme court bench. There was no doubt as to the course Iowa would pursue if the irrepressible conflict became more than a rhetorical phrase.

The touch of Edmund Ruffin's firebrand at Morris Island kindled sparks of resentment and outrage in the remotest western counties of Iowa. The

state raised more regiments than the War Department hoped for and pledged thousands of dollars for the Union cause. Iowa farm products helped feed troops and civilians and also brought in precious gold for foreign exchange. Notwithstanding all these accomplishments and efforts, there was still disaffection in wartime Iowa. Considerable disaffection, in fact, although the evidence indicates that actual treason was a scarce item. Of suspicion and rumors there were plenty, and much hearsay testimony was available, but, despite all the commotion and scores of arrests, there was only a handful of convictions. Significantly, however, the Copperhead label almost turned Iowa into a one-party state and, with few exceptions, wrecked the political future of the chief Iowa Democrats.

One reason for the Copperhead scare was the hysteria that is incidental to any war. Modern Americans have only to recall the herding of citizens of Japanese descent during World War II, or the Iowa incident (repeated in many other states) in 1918 when a minister of German descent at Lowden "was given 48 hours to leave town."¹ This same psychological factor was present in Iowa in the 1860's, demanding absolute unanimity behind the Lincoln administration, the war effort, and (so Democrats claimed) the Republican party. Treason, to many of the most zealous Union supporters, did not lie in levying war against the government, or adhering to the Confederacy, or giving aid and comfort to the South, but simply in being guilty of outspoken criticism of the war policies in the North.

The zealots' memory was singularly short. Little more than a decade earlier, as Whigs, they had joined with Charles Sumner, Horace Greeley, James Russell Lowell, and Theodore Parker in denouncing the Mexican War and the administration which launched it as a crime against humanity. They had not then thought their attitude treasonable. There was Representative Columbus Delano of Ohio, who declared on May 13, 1846, that the Polk administration had promoted an "illegal, unrighteous, and damnable war"² — the same Columbus Delano who made a seconding speech for Abraham Lincoln in 1860. And among these "Conscience Whigs" in 1846 had been the editor of the *Iowa City Standard*, who asserted that the Mexican War

. . . was commenced contrary to law, and in violation of the con-

¹ Cedar Rapids *Daily Republican*, Nov. 12, 1918.

² *Cong. Globe*, 29 Cong., 1 Sess. (1845-1846), 815.

stitution, and the treaty of amity which existed between the two Republics. But we will waive the aggression, as Congress sanctioned and legalized the act; at least by implication. But we intend to hold the Administration responsible for every movement, since the vote of supplies. And a fearful responsibility it will be.³

In the 1860's, Thomas Claggett, Democratic legislator from Keokuk, did not forget these remarks. He is reported to have published a pamphlet in 1864 calling attention to the critics of '46: *The Difference it Makes with Abolitionists When War is Waged for the Defence of the Honor of Our Flag, and a War for the Abolition of Slavery.*⁴ Judge Claggett had forgotten the brevity of the public memory.

Born of a period of extreme emotionalism, the Copperhead scare was soon to become a functional element in Iowa politics. A deliberate and perhaps sincere effort was made to create the impression that treason lurked at every corner. That much is certain. That a political clique found the term "Copperhead" served its masters as a means of destroying the power of their opponents is a matter of record. With Fort Sumter the northern Democrat was given a choice. He could go along with the Lincoln program as a "War Democrat" or oppose the administration as a "Peace Democrat." If choosing the former, "he goes in for the Constitution as it is, the Union as it is, the laws as they are, and for Old Abe for the next four years," an Iowa City editor averred. "That comes so near to being Republicanism itself," he added, that whoever subscribed to that program could be received into the "Republican church."⁵ The truth of the editor's remark was apparent. The choice to the Democrat really seemed to be between joining former political enemies — admitting you had been wrong all the time — or standing by old loyalties and principles.⁶

Thus arises the problem which confronts every historian working with the so-called traitorous Northern elements: the variety of uses of the word

³ Iowa City Standard, Nov. 18, 1846.

⁴ The pamphlet is mentioned in the Des Moines Iowa State Register, Aug. 17, 1864.

⁵ Iowa City Republican, Jan. 30, 1861.

⁶ The dilemma facing the Democrats was posed by a Republican editor in Dubuque. If the Democrats did not support the administration, they would be disloyal, and if they intended to support the administration then "what more will all this accomplish than the Republican Party . . . [and] what good will there be in a Union Democratic Ticket?" Dubuque Weekly Times, Aug. 15, 1861.

"Copperhead." Wood Gray found that Copperhead had "been used as a general term of opprobrium long before the war,"⁷ and its use as a political label in Pennsylvania politics of the 1840's had been proved.⁸ The late James G. Randall surmised that "Like other labels of scorn and hate, the word came to be so inexactly used as to lose all genuine meaning and to become a mere trick of name-calling." Whether it came from the taunts of opponents, or from the fact that the old hard-money Democrats wore the copper one-cent pieces as breastpins, the name was soon used as a smear word and admirably served its purpose. "So far as the word had a justifiable, specific significance it may be said to have denoted secret, subversive, pro-Confederate, or treasonable groups at the North," Randall stated. Certain persons fell into this category and "it was understandable to stigmatize them with this word of burning scorn. Then came the next step: the label came to have such crushing force as a whiplash of reproach that it offered a cheap advantage to those who would use it irresponsibly to smirch political opponents."⁹ Some Iowa Copperheads even tried to embrace the name as a label, concocted by "Black Republicans," which would backfire. "We like it much," wrote the editor of the *Iowa City State Press*; the Copperhead was a fearless, brave, and independent snake that could not be trampled on, for "when once aroused, its bite is awful."¹⁰

To pretend that the label was pleasing was to other Democratic editors a whistling in the dark. "No matter show [*sic*] loyal [t]o the Government or devoted to the Union a man may have been heretofore, if he is now a Democrat, he is a traitor and a knave," the *Washington Democrat* declared.¹¹ As the war dragged on, Iowans charged with Copperheadism deeply resented the term, and in that day when most issues were construed as either black or white (gray was a rebel color) they wanted a clear-cut definition of the word. Until early in 1863, Iowa newspapers favoring the Lincoln administration spoke of the "Peace Democrats" and of other critics of the war policies as "seceshes," "disunionists," "rattlesnakes," or simply as traitors. By 1863, then, the Copperhead became the symbol in Iowa of all

⁷ Wood Gray, *The Hidden Civil War* (New York, 1942), 141.

⁸ Julian P. Boyd, "Copperheads," in *Dictionary of American History*, 2:58.

⁹ James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President* (3 vols., New York, 1945-1952), 3:187.

¹⁰ *Iowa City State Press*, Apr. 25, 1863.

¹¹ *Washington Democrat*, Aug. 12, 1862.

the contempt that could be mustered against the anti-war faction that was "firing on the rear" — the "Peace Democrats." "The Democrats of Greene county are not, as a general thing, Copperheads," the state's leading Republican newspaper, the *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, declared. Although the Greene County Democrats were loyal, the paper continued, that "is more than we can say of the Democrats in many other localities."¹² The editor of a Sioux City Democratic newspaper demanded from his party's state convention a resolution calling for vigorous support of the war. He was promptly accused, by *Des Moines's* voice of Republicanism, of merely using a dishonest Copperhead subterfuge. Editor S. P. Yeomans indignantly counterattacked the *State Register*:

Now this term "Copperhead" seems to have a very broad and undefined signification, and our cotemporary [*sic*] would oblige us by defining his meaning. . . . Is the man a Copperhead who shoulders his musket and fights for the Union, but fails to see the wisdom of the Republican policy . . . does it require that a man surrender blindly the right of private opinion, and acquiesce in every act of the party in power, however flagrantly wrong, in order not to be a Copperhead?¹³

The *State Register* answered that those men who talked of "peace through compromise, and Restoration through Conciliation," were undoubtedly Copperheads.

It was natural that the tempo of this name-calling should reach a kind of peak in 1863, for it was an election year. Although Republican gubernatorial candidate William M. Stone was easily elected, the wide margin of his victory was not foreseen during the campaign. A few weeks before the election the "Iowa Items" column of the *State Register* had 47 entries in one issue; of these, 15 made a direct reference to Copperheads, three more were indirect. Another issue had 27 items in the column, with 11 direct allusions to "Iowa rebels" or Copperheads. Some of the Democrats thus labeled fought back through the courts. B. N. Kinyon of Des Moines brought suit against the *Des Moines Register* "for having used the word 'Copperhead' in connection with his name," and asked \$10,000 in damages. John C. Turk brought a criminal prosecution suit against the *Register* on the same grounds, and before the month ended a third action was brought

¹² *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, May 20, 1863.

¹³ Quoted in *ibid.*, May 27, 1863.

on a similar charge.¹⁴ "Don't spare us, Cops!" the *Register* rejoined with defiance. "It will give us great pleasure to respond to all your calls for satisfaction." In August, 1863, the charges were thrown out of court by a grand jury. Seemingly vindicated, the *Register* was editorially exuberant. "The freedom of the press has been sustained; and as dirty a set of sorry Copperheads as ever disgraced a white settlement in a free country, have been rebuked and humiliated."¹⁵

Meanwhile, the *Register* denied the charge that its policy was to designate all Democrats as Copperheads. Whoever makes that charge, said the *Register*, "is both an ass and a falsifier." There was a distinct difference. "What is a Copperhead? He is not a Democrat, but a miserable thief who has stolen the Democratic name as a covering for his villanies. He is a slimy reptile whose affinities are with the original Serpent in the Garden."¹⁶

Even in those days of intense personal journalism, punctuated as it was with the occasional horse-whipping of an editor, the attack on the Copperheads in Iowa was not generated spontaneously out of the disasters at Bull Run or the victory at Fort Donelson. From the first days of the war, a determined "Peace Democrat" opposition had persistently demanded "the Constitution as it is, the Union as it was!" Able men led this opposition, although there was a definite attempt made at the time to discount their abilities by casting aspersions on their loyalty and sometimes their mentality. These Copperheads, as they came to be called, came from the strict-constructionist wing of the Democratic party. By a strange trick of fate the conservative status quo Democrats became the radicals of the Civil War. They believed, and diary notes attest their sincerity, that a house divided was preferable to a war between brothers. In Lincoln's policies they saw an end to constitutional government, an end to state sovereignty, and the supreme triumph of the Republican party. These men deserve further study.

Foremost among the Iowa Copperheads, but by no means the accepted leader of the Peace Democrats, was Dennis A. Mahony. This fiery Irish immigrant edited the *Dubuque Herald*, sat in the General Assembly, and was a bullwhip for the Democratic party in Iowa. He detested New England industrialism, favored white supremacy, and flirted with the idea of a commercial alliance between the upper Mississippi states and the South

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, May 27, July 8, 1863.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Aug. 5, 1863.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, June 17, 1863.

when the war ended, as he predicted, in a Northern failure to subjugate the Confederacy. "To talk of peace is treason; to petition Congress for the restoration of peace is treason," he charged. "In a word it is treason to be a Patriot, and patriotic to be a Traitor."¹⁷ Egged on by Mahony's continued attacks on the war policy, federal officials finally ordered his arrest. With the habeas corpus suspended, he was whisked from his home in Dubuque in August, 1862, and taken to the Old Capitol prison in Washington, D. C. Mahony was never formally charged with any crime and was finally released after taking a loyalty oath of allegiance on November 11.¹⁸

Another central figure in Iowa Copperhead circles was Henry Clay Dean. So many fanciful stories have come down to us about Dean that it is difficult to discern his true character. Perhaps he was as untidy as his political opponents alleged when they spoke of him as "Dirty-Shirt Dean." Whatever his personal habits may have been, he was regarded as a stirring orator with a lashing tongue. A former Whig, Dean had served as chaplain to the United States Senate during part of Pierce's administration, and after his return to Iowa had staunchly defended the Democratic party. Like Mahony, Dean was arrested on a suspicion of treason, but after a short internment in St. Louis he was released without a trial. The arrest only spurred Dean to more accusations of the Lincoln administration as an autocratic despotism. For all his eccentricities, real or imagined, Dean had a first-rate mind as his book — *Crimes of the Civil War, or The Curse of the Funding System* — later proved. Printed in the postwar period, it was among the first harbingers of the Greenback movement.¹⁹

Others in the front ranks of the Copperheads, although they would not have used the name themselves, were LeGrand Byington, Judge Charles Mason, and George W. Jones. Byington had been a state legislator and editor in Ohio, but he moved to Iowa in 1849 where he soon became a moderately wealthy landowner. In 1860 Byington campaigned for Stephen A. Douglas and during the wartime campaigns acted as chairman of the

¹⁷ Dubuque *Herald*, July 12, 1861.

¹⁸ John A. Marshall, *American Bastille . . .* (Philadelphia, 1885), 403-416. See also Mahony's own book, *A Prisoner of State* (New York, 1863). Mahony's experience was not unique. Marshall cites evidence that 21 Iowans were arrested arbitrarily and later released without being charged or tried. Scattered newspaper accounts tell of the arrest of 45 other Iowans between 1861-1865 for alleged disloyalty.

¹⁹ Charles E. Snyder, "Henry Clay Dean" (unpublished ms., State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City).

Democratic central committee. He refused to pay taxes for what he regarded an "unconstitutional war," thereby losing a large portion of his holdings in tax sales. Judge Mason was a West Point graduate, first justice of the Iowa Supreme Court, and 1861 candidate for governor on the Democratic ticket. Mason preferred recognition of the Confederacy to a forceful subjugation of the South and regarded himself as a strict constitutionalist.²⁰ Although he was never arrested, Mason was threatened with a lynching at Keokuk in 1863 and was probably correct when he wrote in his diary that the Burlington mayor kept a list of "23 ascertained Secessionists and of 15 more who are strongly suspected." Mason added cryptically, "I am doubtless included. . . ." ²¹ Jones was an old warrior for the Democratic party and a former United States Senator from Iowa. On the basis of a friendly letter he had written from his post as the American Minister at Bogota, New Granada, to Jefferson Davis (who was an old friend), Jones was arrested upon his return to his homeland in December, 1861. The fact that the letter was written before Jones knew of the outbreak of the war was ignored. He was never indicted or brought to trial, and was released after several months' imprisonment at Fort Lafayette, New York. He returned to Dubuque and although he preferred obscurity during the remainder of the war, opposition newspapers continued to include his name in their list of leading Copperheads.²²

Behind these men, who by their actions or the prominence of their names became worthy targets of the Copperhead epithet, were dozens of newspaper editors, former Democratic officeholders, and the rank and the file of the Democratic party. Loyal to their concept of the Democratic party as the peace party, they were vulnerable targets in a period when loyalty was supposed to mean support of a war policy. "By their frankness in revealing their aims they permitted themselves to be made whipping boys on whom supporters of the war could vent the feelings generated by frustration on the battlefield," Wood Gray has noted.²³ The election returns in 1861 indicated to practical politicians the weakened condition of the Democratic

²⁰ Charles Mason Remey (ed.), *The Diaries of Charles Mason* (12 typescript vols., Washington, 1939), 5:493.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 534.

²² Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa* (4 vols., New York, 1903), 2:85; John Carl Parish, *George Wallace Jones* (Iowa City, 1912), 238-41.

²³ Gray, *Hidden Civil War*, 140.

party in Iowa, for the party was already the "whipping boy" even though the term "Copperhead" was not yet conversational currency. The exodus from the party of former Democrats who aspired for office, and were realistic enough to see the effects of their opponents' propaganda techniques, was well under way by 1862. Nathaniel B. Baker, Cyrus Bussey, M. M. Crocker, and C. C. Cole deserted the Democrats and went with the "War Democrats" into the Republican ranks.²⁴ Such switching of party affiliation continued as late as 1876, when General James M. Tuttle, Democratic candidate for governor in 1863 and for Congress in 1866, bolted to the Republicans. He was elected to the General Assembly under their banner in 1882.²⁵

Iowa newspaper editors who supported the war found ready readers in most localities, while the list of those favoring a peace policy constantly dwindled. Dubuque supported Mahony's *Herald*, for hundreds of German and Irish immigrants in the river city had flocked to the Democratic party during the Know-Nothing excitement of the 1850's and had remained "with the Democracy." Consistent criticism of the Lincoln administration came from the Iowa City *State Press*, Des Moines *Iowa State Journal*, Davenport *Keokuk Constitution*, and Fairfield *Constitution and Union*. There were several Democratic campaign papers that had a short life and then expired after the election results were counted, such as the Burlington *Argus* and Marion *Democrat*. Two German-language newspapers, *Der Davenport Demokrat* and *Der Dubuque National-Demokrat*, criticized the Lincoln administration. The Dubuque paper declared "die sudlichen Rebellen und die nordlichen Abolitionisten stehen auf demselben Grund."²⁶ Further opposition to the President and his policies came from the Washington *Democrat*, McGregor *North Iowa Times*, Sioux City *Register*, West Union *Fayette County Public Review*, West Union *Fayette County Pioneer*, Independence *Conservative*, Keosauqua *Des Moines News*, Ottumwa *Democratic Union*, and Marengo *Iowa Valley Democrat*.²⁷

²⁴ L. F. Andrews, *Pioneers of Polk County, Iowa . . .* (2 vols., Des Moines, 1908), 1:377ff.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:315-16. See also Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, July 18, 1876.

²⁶ The comment translated: "the southern rebels and the northern abolitionists stand on the same ground." *Der Dubuque National-Demokrat*, June 19, 1862.

²⁷ This is not intended to be a complete list of the anti-Lincoln newspapers in Iowa, but only those which the writer has either found available in the library of

Were the anti-administration newspapers disloyal? Frank Luther Mott, the Iowa-born newspaper historian, admits that "to draw a line between loyal critics of the conduct of the war and Copperheads was not then and is not now always easy."²⁸ Practically every newspaper that printed criticism of the war or of Lincoln ran the risk of being accused of treason. The editor of the Keosauqua Democratic organ found this more than he could stomach early in 1861, and commented:

When the Republicans attempt to stop the mouths of those who are opposed to the administration of Mr. Lincoln, they will find themselves mistaken — it is understood in this Country that the administration of any President, is not above the people, a thing so holy that the people should not call its acts into question. This may be republican doctrine when in power. We feel disposed to give the party opposed to the democracy, credit for being in favor of the war now, for it is the first one they ever have been in favor of since the formation of our government — is it because the government is now under their control or have they got more patriotism than usual?²⁹

But despite the protests of editors that they could print peace propaganda, question Lincoln's policies, and still be loyal, they were all lumped into one class — Copperheads. "It is not those who criticise the flagitious acts of the Administration, or who object to its unwarrantable assumption of power, who give aid or comfort to the enemy," Dennis Mahony asserted, "but those who approve of and applaud the acts of despotism which have brought the Federal Government into disparaging contrast with the despotisms of the Old World."³⁰

If we accept the definition of a Copperhead as one who discouraged army enlistments, denounced the draft, and predicted the war would end in a failure for the Union cause, Mahony was a Copperhead. His *Herald* printed favorable stories about the famous Confederate general, "Stonewall" Jackson, and still managed to applaud Union victories. No other Iowa editor walked the tightrope as Mahony did, but that mattered little to the opposi-

the State Historical Society of Iowa or has had other positive evidence of their policy.

²⁸ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism, A History of Newspapers in the United States . . .* (New York, 1950), 355.

²⁹ Keosauqua *Des Moines News*, May 11, 1861.

³⁰ Dubuque *Herald*, May 27, 1863.

tion, for there was no degree of loyalty taken into account. "He who is not a friend of the Union is a foe," was the chant in dozens of pro-administration newspapers. Their feeling was mirrored by public reaction. Mobs threatened the Dubuque *Herald*, Oskaloosa *Times*, and Keosauqua *Des Moines News* offices, and perhaps others, while Judge Claggett's Keokuk *Constitution* office was smashed by a mob, the type scattered, and the presses dumped into the Mississippi.³¹

More than mob action was used to silence the opposition press, however. At the same time that Mahony was arrested, federal officers took David Sheward, editor of the Fairfield *Constitution and Union*, into custody. Both men were sent to the Old Capitol prison. Judge Mason, who was in Washington, offered to defend them and predicted that they would never be tried. While in prison Mahony had been nominated as the Democratic candidate for Congress from the third Iowa district. "Tomorrow the Iowa [state] election comes off," Mason noted, "and they will be released without a trial as soon as that can be done without making it too apparent that they were imprisoned solely to operate upon our elections."³² There is no evidence to substantiate Mason's charge except the circumstantial, but it is a fact that Sheward and Mahony were released on November 11, several weeks after the election that was won by Mahony's opponent, William B. Allison.

Considering the fact that about 135 Northern newspapers that favored a peace policy were raided or destroyed by mob action, it seems that Iowans practiced more restraint than their neighbors.³³ The high casualty rate of Democratic newspapers during the war period suggests that an economic boycott was the favored method of choking off opposition to the war. Such a scheme was advocated, not only for newspapers, but for all Democratic merchants. In reply to an article which urged consumers not to trade with Copperheads, the editor of the Council Bluffs *Bugle* declared that those who followed that advice would be "cutting their own throats."

They forget that in this region the substantial men — the men who have the most to sell and buy the most are Democrats. . . . They conclude that they may exhibit their patriotism (?) by declaring nonintercourse with Democrats without incurring the risk of losing

³¹ Iowa City *Republican*, Feb. 25, 1863.

³² Remy (ed.), *Mason Diary*, 6:665.

³³ Joe Skidmore, "The Copperhead Press and the Civil War," *Journalism Quarterly*, 16:349 (1939).

a cent. In this they are mistaken and if Democrats would do to them as they propose to do to Democrats, it would not be long before the doors of these ultras would be shut and a sign hung out "this room to let."³⁴

In those days, when a newspaper could be purchased for less than \$800, the operation of a partisan journal in the county was deemed necessary by both parties. The Democrats lost much influence when the local Copperhead newspapers died of circulatory ailments, leaving the peace party without a public organ in the county.

The vagueness of the word "Copperhead" not only disturbs the modern historian, it also constantly harassed accused Copperheads. As seen earlier, editors of the Democratic newspapers generally insisted that to be a Democrat was to run the risk of being called a Copperhead. The *North Iowa Times* editor went further:

Some over pious political saint whose brother or nephew or some other relation has probably just received a sutler-ship or a contractorship in the army bursts out in a string of definitions under the caption, "Who are the Copperheads?" In this string of pearls at random strung we find the following:

"Every man who opposes the President's Emancipation Proclamation."

"Every man who opposes the suspension of the writ of Habeas Corpus."

"Every man who harbors constitutional objections to the means adopted by the President for ending the rebellion."

Argument with the man who conceived definitions which strike at civil liberty, and justify the assumption of despotic power by the President, would be thrown away. The writer of them is already as abject a slave as he who toils in the cotton fields of Alabama.³⁵

Part of the trouble came from the current practice of equating the freebooter from the Missouri border region with the local druggist who had supported Douglas in 1860. And, of course, there were plenty of Iowans who did not like the personal effects of a vigorous war policy, particularly conscription.

Iowa had a splendid record for furnishing volunteers, but the prolonged war with its high casualty rate eventually made the draft inevitable. One

³⁴ Council Bluffs *Bugle*, Aug. 18, 1864.

³⁵ McGregor *North Iowa Times*, Jan. 20, 1864.

fact which probably made the draft harder to take, when it did come, was the previous assurances from many pro-Lincoln newspapers that the administration would not resort to conscription. Some German and Irish immigrants were notably recalcitrant, claiming exemption as aliens if possible. Adjutant-General Nathaniel Baker expressed his feelings on the plea of alienage thus: "I trust that public sentiment will compel all (unless here for temporary residence) who have plead [sic] alienage, to leave the State or to repent of their sins, and at the earliest possible date become citizens of the United States of America, and hereafter to do their duty."³⁶ Baker saw that the names of men who claimed an alien's exemption were printed, for all the community to see, and he expressed his belief that the plea of alienage "will stand as a disgrace to the men who made it."

Whatever the reason for the slow-down of the drafting process, the blame was heaped on the Copperheads. The Copperhead newspapers most certainly had insisted that the provision which permitted the drafted man to buy a substitute meant "this is a rich man's war and the poor man's fight." "What the conscript bill means," the *Iowa City State Press* declared, "'Your money or your life.'"³⁷ The *Muscatine Courier* suggested that a vote for the Democratic ticket in 1863 would help stop the draft. "It is now announced that there will be no draft before the election. People of Iowa, it is for you to say whether there shall be a draft after the election. And it will stand in hand those of us who have no \$300 to buy our exemption papers, to so vote as not to require any draft."³⁸ The *Des Moines Register* reported that several men who claimed draft exemptions as aliens had been confronted with proof that they had voted. "In every instance, these voting foreigners who are claiming exemption from military duty, are Copperheads."³⁹

The matter became serious when the so-called "draft dodgers" resorted to violence. Two federal officers sent to arrest men who had illegally avoided the draft in Poweshiek County were ambushed and killed on September 30, 1864. The murders were immediately attributed to an organization known as the "Democrat Rangers," allegedly formed as a militia

³⁶ *Report of the Adjutant General . . . of the State of Iowa, 1864-1865* (Des Moines, 1865), v.

³⁷ *Iowa City State Press*, Apr. 25, 1863.

³⁸ *Muscatine Courier*, Sept. 26, 1863.

³⁹ *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, Dec. 21, 1864.

company with a subversive program of draft resistance. Some members of the company were arrested but later released when Governor William M. Stone decided that "we cannot legitimately retain those who cannot be shown to have had some connection, either directly or indirectly, with the offense."⁴⁰ Getting the evidence proved difficult, but once arrested, a man's reputation was hard hit. Often the arrests were able to do what was intended, quiet the neighborhood without actual convictions.

Wherever resistance of the draft reached a militant stage, the blame was often placed on the "Knights of the Golden Circle." This organization, using the name of a group formed before the war ever began by a quixotic Ohioan with delusions of grandeur, was charged with being the catch-all for Northern traitors. Iowa historian S. H. M. Byers, writing in the 1880's, asserted that many were "paid agents of the Rebels in the South," that others were desperadoes, "and many were the ignorant scum of the democratic party, misled into wrong doing." "But," continued Byers, "all were Democrats. There was not a Republican among them."⁴¹ Adjutant-General Baker had sources of information which, accepted at face value, told him there were thousands of Knights along the southern boundary.⁴² Their alleged oath included a promise that the individual would exert himself "to unite the States of the Northwest with the Southern Confederacy." Informers painted a dark picture for Clarke and Madison counties. A man identified only as "Williams," who was working with Baker and with federal marshal H. M. Hoxie of Des Moines, declared there were at least 42,000 Knights at work in Iowa. This figure was used in official correspondence, but even more alarming was Hoxie's report that the K. G. C. was "thoroughly organized in every township of this [fifth] Congressional district, and I am informed the entire State." Recruiting officers were to be on their guard against a "fifth column," while arms and powder were to be issued only to loyal militiamen. An oath of loyalty was finally prescribed in an effort to eradicate from the home militia companies any taint of Copperheadism; the Iowan sworn into the militia solemnly declared he did not belong "to any organization, either secret or otherwise, which has for its object opposition to the present war . . . that I have no sympathy whatever

⁴⁰ *Report of the Adjutant General . . . 1864-1865*, 1411-15.

⁴¹ S. H. M. Byers, *Iowa in War Times* (Des Moines, 1888), 180.

⁴² *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records . . .*, Series III, Vol. III, 66-72. (Hereafter cited as *Official Records*.)

with those in rebellion, and that my desire is to see said war prosecuted with vigor until the rebellion is crushed," and peace restored.⁴³

Whether such precautions and arrests were necessary is not altogether certain. The army sent the Judge Advocate General, Joseph Holt, to the Midwest to investigate the K. G. C. His famous report told of multifarious activities in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, and Missouri, but did not mention Iowa.⁴⁴ Clement L. Vallandigham, the Ohio Congressman who was an extremist in his opposition to the war, was held up to the Iowa voters as a fellow conspirator with George W. Jones and Mahony without a shred of evidence.⁴⁵ Mahony admitted that the Democrats had formed secret societies as a counteraction forced on them by the organization of the Republican Union League. The Dubuque editor charged that Governor Kirkwood and the Union League had a secret agreement to furnish the League members with government-owned weapons "for the purpose of over-awing democrats and preventing them from exercising their political rights." In Dubuque not all were convinced by Mahony's reasoning. Bishop Clement Smyth actually reminded his diocese that those who joined any secret society would be excommunicated.⁴⁶

When the Democrats cried that the K. G. C. was a Republican bogeyman, the Republicans shot back further accusations. The Knights soon went into an eclipse and were replaced by the Order of American Knights, and later still by the Sons of Liberty. The objects of these orders were all the same, the administration supporters claimed, resting chiefly in inciting desertion, resistance to the draft, aiding the enemy in deed and print, and fostering the idea of a Northwest-Southern confederacy.⁴⁷

As we write, a trial for alleged conspiracy is in progress in the U. S. Court in this City, and the evidence thus far submitted shows that an Order similar in its character has been in operation in this State, and there is reason to believe it is in operation in every populous county. The Government is after this new form of Treason in all the States and if any professedly *Union Demo-*

⁴³ *Report of the Adjutant General . . . 1864-1865*, 881-2.

⁴⁴ *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXXIX, Part II, 214.

⁴⁵ *Keokuk Weekly Gate City*, Apr. 16, May 14, 1862.

⁴⁶ *Dubuque Herald*, May 27, 1863; Roger J. Sullivan, "Mahony, the Unterrified" (unpublished thesis, Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa).

⁴⁷ *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, Nov. 5, 1864.

crat has unwittingly been drawn into it, the sooner he washes his hands of the criminality of the membership, the better it will be for him.⁴⁸

These men were found guilty. In Mahaska County a government witness accused Judge Claggett of presiding over a Sons of Liberty meeting. Claggett immediately signed an affidavit disavowing the connection and vainly asked that the witness be arrested on a perjury charge.⁴⁹

In most of these affairs the evidence was oral. No documentary evidence of the existence of any treasonous secret organization in Iowa has been found. That there were some secret groups opposed to the Lincoln administration in Iowa is indeed probable, but whether they had the membership or program which opponents ascribed to them seems dubious. Professor Randall declared in 1937: "It is clear now that the main purpose of the 'Knights' was to promote the success of the Democratic party, and careful historians do not accept the view that they were a dangerous organization of a thoroughly treasonable nature."⁵⁰ In his 1952 study of Lincoln, Randall had not altered his judgment but found further evidence to substantiate it. Randall wrote that Republicans who denounced the Democratic societies "would conveniently omit to show that in the whole broad picture Democrats were overwhelmingly loyal, patriotic, and firm for the Union."⁵¹

Closer to home was the analysis of Frank Hickenlooper, who wrote a history of Monroe County several decades after the war ended. Of the Knights of the Golden Circle he stated:

While the name was familiar to every one, the existence in Monroe County of such an organization was probably a myth. In the first place, those identified with the movement would have been apprehended by the loyal citizens of the county, and, under the high tension of excitement existing at the time, would have been roughly dealt with. . . . The public brain was heated to madness, and in the blindness of intense partisan feeling many of these acrimonious charges made by the respective political parties against each other had no real foundation. . . . The term was used more as a malediction against the more active and partisan

⁴⁸ Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Oct. 26, 1864.

⁴⁹ *Idem*.

⁵⁰ J. G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1937), 389-90.

⁵¹ Randall, *Lincoln the President*, 3:193.

Democrats of the county than anything else, as nearly every noted Democrat was branded as a Knight of the Golden Circle.⁵²

To expect unanimity among over half a million people in Iowa was to expect the impossible. That the local elements of dissent were magnified out of all proportion appears to have been the case.

Of course there were incidents that gave credence to the wildest flights of the imagination. Bushwhackers (probably from across the Missouri border) burned the Fremont County courthouse at Sidney, occasionally spread terror through Davis County, and frightened Josiah B. Grinnell into a frantic appeal from Ottumwa (where he was on the hustings) for arms.⁵³ One of the most notorious incidents involved Rev. Cyphert Tally, who was fatally wounded during a gun fight brought about at South English in the summer of 1863 by hotheads in both the Republican and Democratic parties. Tally, a Baptist minister with a Southern background, rode into the village at the head of some Democratic partisans, knowing full well that the Republicans were having a rally and that tempers would be short. In a matter of moments Tally was shot down, fatally wounded. The sight of blood soon brought both sides to their senses, and the shooting stopped. The usual wild rumors of exaggerated casualties followed. The most distressing reports had between 500 and 5,000 rebellious Copperheads rendezvousing on the Skunk River, gathering forces to avenge Tally's murder. Governor Kirkwood and General Baker were called on to act by a delegation of hysterical citizens, and Kirkwood actually came to Sigourney with a promise of troops and arms. Less than a dozen militia companies were rushed to Keokuk County, but the disturbance had, in fact, ended with Tally's death. A grand jury which investigated the incident returned no indictments.⁵⁴

College students in wartime Iowa were not exempt from the emotional strain that bothered their elders. The 1863 commencement at Cornell College was made the scene of a near riot when several young men and women appeared wearing Copperhead badges cut from one-cent pieces. "One girl

⁵² Frank Hickenlooper, *An Illustrated History of Monroe County, Iowa* (Albia, Iowa, 1896), 145-6.

⁵³ *Official Records*, Series III, Vol. II, 403-404. See also *Report of the Adjutant General . . . 1864-1865*, 1419-28.

⁵⁴ *The History of Keokuk County* (Des Moines, 1880), 448. See also C. C. Stiles, "The Skunk River War (or Tally War)," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 19:614-31 (April, 1935).

about 18 years old who had on a copperhead pin was assaulted by the loyal women present, and a severe scuffle ensued, during which the girl aforesaid had her wearing apparel badly used up," a newspaper reported.⁵⁵ The young men wearing badges were forced to give them up and to shout three cheers for the Union. At the State University in Iowa City a student from Iowa County was expelled in 1863 for "wearing his copperhead badge, in defiance of the rules of the University."⁵⁶ The Democratic Dubuque *Herald* approved the action, declaring that "there can be no good reason" for wearing political emblems or badges in schools and colleges. "In this spirit we rather approve than censure the course of the faculty at Iowa City," the *Herald* added. "Let it be followed up by driving partisan politics out of every school and other institution of learning in the State."⁵⁷

The effects of the drive against Copperheads in Iowa were reflected in the sentiments of Iowa troops stationed in the fighting zones. Sergeant Cyrus F. Boyd with the 15th Iowa Infantry noted in his diary that men in his outfit were "getting letters from 'Copperheads' in the North advising them to desert the abolition army."⁵⁸ Cyrus C. Carpenter wrote from his post at Corinth, Mississippi, of his desire to return to the political scene in Iowa to help "the Union party this fall, make speeches in vindication of my Gov't, and help trample Copperheadism into the earth."⁵⁹ When Captain M. B. Bennett of the 40th Iowa Infantry returned on leave to his home in Knoxville he was accused of speaking for Copperhead candidates at political rallies. The *Iowa State Register* scornfully noted that Bennett was "magnanimous enough to advise his friends (Copperheads, of course), not to resist the draft!"⁶⁰ LeGrand Byington, chairman of the state Democratic central committee during the 1863 election, suspected that the Republican officers of Iowa regiments would not distribute Democratic ballots to the soldier voters. He wrote Major-General U. S. Grant at Vicksburg, requesting permission to pass out Democratic tickets among the soldiers in the Army of the Tennessee. Grant replied "that loyal citizens of Northern

⁵⁵ Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, July 8, 1863.

⁵⁶ *Iowa City Republican*, May 20, 1863.

⁵⁷ *Dubuque Herald*, May 27, 1863.

⁵⁸ Mildred Throne (ed.), "Civil War Diary of Cyrus F. Boyd . . .," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 50:354 (October, 1952).

⁵⁹ C. C. Carpenter to Kate Burkholder, June 28, 1863, *Cyrus Clay Carpenter Papers* (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City).

⁶⁰ Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, Aug. 12, 1863.

States will be allowed to visit the troops from their States at any time," but cautioned that "Electioneering or any course calculated to arouse discordant feelings will be prohibited."⁶¹ Byington apparently never had a chance to learn whether he was regarded by Grant as loyal or not, but the results of soldier voting were overwhelmingly against the Democrats. Word reached Byington that bundles of Democratic tickets were left untouched because officers knew that "the least effort they make in that direction would insure Kirkwood's displeasure and blast their hopes of preferment."⁶²

Considering the party passions aroused, agreement by Copperheads and pro-administration spokesmen on any issue seemed unlikely. Many newspapers supporting Lincoln's policies shrank from the "Black Republican" label applied to them by the Democrats. Admittedly finding the Negro distasteful, they nevertheless managed to portray the Copperheads as more unsavory. The *Des Moines Register* reported rumors of a dance attended by Negroes and white women. "This is horrible if true!" the *Register* commented, then went on to say that the situation was brought about by a "Copperhead Scribe" who had "taken a few select white females of his own acquaintance. . . ." ⁶³ At another time, the same newspaper had declared that "It is true that the Negroes belong to a degraded race; but it is equally true that the devils who malignantly abuse them, and deride the Government, are more degraded by far than the greasiest, dirtiest Ethiopian whose body finds a resting place in the 'Lincum Hotel.'" ⁶⁴ Iowans devoted to the antislavery cause added blind prejudice to the other Copperhead faults. "'Nigger on the brain' is so deep rooted in the Copperhead, or Democratic, skull, that all thought of justice to the human race is driven therefrom," the *Fairfield Ledger* stated.⁶⁵

This anti-Negro attitude in wartime Iowa may have resulted in part from the Southern background of many Iowa families, but that factor would be meaningless when taking into account the Irish and German prejudices against the Negro. A further explanation came from Wood Gray, who noted in his study of the Copperheads that "the views and prejudices of

⁶¹ U. S. Grant to Byington, Aug. 4, 1863, *LeGrand Byington Papers* (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City).

⁶² George Van Hosen to Byington, Aug. 20, 1863, *ibid.*

⁶³ Quoted in *Marengo Iowa County Review*, Jan. 14, 1864.

⁶⁴ *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, Aug. 5, 1863.

⁶⁵ *Fairfield Ledger*, July 13, 1865.

the immigrant generation tended to persist and to be transmitted to their descendants." Gray discerned among immigrants a definite hatred of the slave labor system which apparently offered men of wealth "an unfair economic advantage."

But also — and failure to grasp this fact has led to much misunderstanding of the attitude of the Midwest toward sectional issues of the 1840's and '50's — this hatred extended with equal or greater fervor to the Negro himself, and was coupled with the ever-present fear that any weakening of this bondage would permit him to migrate northward.⁶⁶

The Democrats in Iowa maintained a strong prejudice against the Negro, and attempted to use the issue in state elections even after the Constitution had been altered to give the Negro citizenship. The Copperheads welcomed the label of an anti-Negro party, as the *Burlington Argus* made clear in 1862 when it declared: "There is not now, and cannot be, but two parties in the loyal States arrayed against each other at the coming election — the party that stands upon the broad platform of the Constitution, and the abolition party . . . composed of abolition fanatics and plunder seekers of every hue and stripe. . . ." ⁶⁷

Along with the odium attached to the Negro, the Copperheads in Iowa attempted to make political capital out of the agrarian unrest brought on by the war. Worthless banknotes, rotting produce, and high freight rates helped foster feeling against the Lincoln administration after the outbreak of war. Farmers who had voted for Buchanan and Douglas found it easy to shift the blame for declining farm prices to the Republican doorstep. The banknotes of many Wisconsin and Illinois banks became worthless when the Southern state bond investments of those institutions were lost. "Our farmers have already lost heavily by the 'cat' institutions," the Iowa City pro-Republican *State Reporter* commented, and with specie available the demand was for "a little more gold and a little less currency."⁶⁸ Hard money became scarce as grain prices slumped, while wages for farm laborers increased because of the manpower shortage. The obvious reason for the decline in farm prices was that the Mississippi, a natural avenue of commerce, was blockaded, thus choking off the grain market. Railroad

⁶⁶ Gray, *Hidden Civil War*, 23.

⁶⁷ *Burlington Argus*, July 4, 1862.

⁶⁸ *Iowa City State Reporter*, May 22, 1861.

companies, finding their biggest competitor shackled by the war, boosted their rates by 30 to 40 per cent.⁶⁹

Following the defeat at first Manassas, wheat sold at Dubuque for 42 cents a bushel, oats brought a dime, butter was available for six cents a pound, and eggs were worth from three to five cents a dozen.⁷⁰ Iowa farmers received an average price of \$3.41 per hundredweight for their hogs during the first year of war, with corn bringing an average of 16 cents at Christmas in 1861.⁷¹ Cattle prices during the early months of the war sank lower as freight rates on the railroads increased, causing some drovers to drive their cattle overland to Burlington, Dubuque, or Chicago rather "than to pay the ordinary fair [sic] on the road, on their return, in obedience to an order from the officers of the C. B. & Q. R. R."⁷²

High-handed methods adopted by the railroads caused Iowans in all walks of life to show concern, but to the "Peace Democrats" who had warned against a breakup of the Union the gouge was typical of eastern capitalists. Even a Republican newspaper found the situation intolerable, with the Dubuque *Weekly Times* declaring:

The freight bills we have to pay between here and New York are ruinous, extortionate. The best amber Iowa wheat in New York is worth \$1.25 per bushel. Now let us see what it costs to get it there from Dubuque:

The railroad freight, ferriage, drayage, etc. to Chicago	15
Lake freight to Buffalo	25
Canal freight to New York	18
Storage commissions, insurance interest	5
Total	63

Leaving a balance of 62 cents to be realized by the shipper in case none of the grain is lost or spoiled on the way. . . . When it is known that it costs 53 cents to get a bushel of corn from Dubuque to New York, where it is worth only 62 cents, it is easy to understand why it is worth only 10 cents here. Feed your corn to stock.⁷³

⁶⁹ Earle D. Ross, *Iowa Agriculture* (Iowa City, 1951), 53.

⁷⁰ Dubuque *Weekly Times*, July 11, 1861.

⁷¹ Norman V. Strand, "Prices of Farm Products in Iowa, 1851-1940," *Iowa State College Research Bulletin No. 303* (May, 1942), 938.

⁷² "Jefferson County" in *Eighth Report of the Iowa State Agricultural Society . . .* (Des Moines, 1863), 245.

⁷³ Dubuque *Weekly Times*, Oct. 31, 1861.

Obviously, the lack of competition from the river carriers permitted the railroads to make their own terms.

Discounting partisanship, there was some basis for the Democratic newspaper charge that "hard times" had struck Iowa. "Let the mechanics and laboring men of all classes who are now feeling the pressure of hard times, remember that it has all been caused by the Republican party," the *Washington Democrat* counseled.⁷⁴ "The Banks loan to Brokers, and the Brokers shave the people," the *Burlington Argus* grumbled. "The public works have stores at one end and Broker's shops at the other, to grind the laborer out of his daily bread. The county is bankrupt-covered, thatched and buried in mortgage."⁷⁵

The grievance against the railroads was real, and if the farmers burdened with ten-cent oats had not blamed the Lincoln administration it would indeed have been remarkable, despite the fact that criticism of the administration was called treason. The dissent was more noticeable in Illinois, where Major-General John A. McClernand advised Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton that the river blockade placed the shippers from the upper Mississippi region at the mercy of eastern railroad combinations. McClernand warned Stanton that unless the Mississippi was reopened soon "a new party will spring into existence" that would favor recognizing the Confederacy as a means of renewing commerce on the river.⁷⁶

Iowa farmers, squeezed between low prices and high shipping costs, were equally certain that the river had to be opened to their products. Secretary J. H. Wallace of the Iowa State Agricultural Society reported in 1863:

Aside from the devastations and horrors of war which have fallen so heavily on many portions of the land, the attempt to violate and set at nought the laws of trade and exchange of commodities which God impressed on this continent when He created it, has had a most crushing effect upon all the permanent industrial interests of the North-West, and no portion has suffered and is suffering so much as our own State.

With the Mississippi closed, the Iowa farmer had been left "to the tender mercies of relentless gamblers in Rail Road stocks." Wallace's words con-

⁷⁴ *Washington Democrat*, March 5, 1861.

⁷⁵ *Burlington Argus*, May 24, 1862.

⁷⁶ Major-General John A. McClernand to E. M. Stanton, Nov. 10, 1862, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Part II, 333.

tained the hint of the so-called "Granger Laws" of a later day when he declared:

So far as roads East of us are concerned, we can do nothing compulsory, but as regards our own State, by unitedly meeting the question, we can, at least, have it determined whether the Rail Roads control the State, or the State controls the Rail Roads. And if the latter, we can establish by law, a tariff of charges, of so much per ton per mile, that will protect the farmer until his produce gets beyond the limits of the State.

Wallace believed that railroads were "at best but a poor substitute for the Mississippi," and no set of farmers was more interested in reopening the river than those from Iowa. "The grain growing interests of this State are absolutely dead without it."⁷⁷

In these circumstances the extreme views of the Dubuque *Herald* staff had their hearing. Convinced that the South could not, or should not, be subjugated, the *Herald* openly declared that destiny linked the Mississippi Valley to the South. "With the Mississippi in common between us and the South, with a line of communication open to the seaboard through a friendly and not a hostile Confederacy," the *Herald* could only see the natural alliance blossoming into something more.⁷⁸ Such a view meant a renunciation of the Democratic slogan — "The Constitution as it is, the Union as it was" — but the *Herald* was so thoroughly in the peace camp by 1863 that most of its proposals postulated the failure of the war. Mahony's chimerical dream of a Northwest Confederacy was dashed, however, by the upsurge of farm prices and the opening of the Mississippi by the fall of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863. With greenback inflation at hand, and the route to the ocean once more unfettered, the days of ten-cent oats in Iowa were over. By November, 1864, Iowa wheat was selling for \$1.00 to \$1.50, oats brought up to 50 cents, and corn sold for as much as 75 cents a bushel.⁷⁹ In that same month criticism of Lincoln continued, but a 26,000-vote majority in Iowa over the Democratic candidate McClellan indicated a rising agrarian approbation of the President's policies.

So far, the Copperhead in Iowa had been sound and fury. It is logical

⁷⁷ *Eighth Report of the Iowa State Agricultural Society*, 126-7.

⁷⁸ *Dubuque Herald*, Jan. 21, 1863.

⁷⁹ *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, Nov. 9, 1864. See also Strand, "Prices of Farm Products in Iowa," 955-75.

to ask: where did the Copperheads have their real strength in Iowa? In a state predominantly agricultural, some of the support for the "Peace Democrats" must have come from farmers. Professor Frank L. Klement has interpreted Midwestern Copperheadism as a movement based on a "faith in Jeffersonian principles."⁸⁰ "The protest of lamenting laborers and disgruntled agrarians underwrote Midwestern Copperheadism," he writes elsewhere.⁸¹ Unquestionably, many Iowa Copperheads were immigrant laborers, but many more were men of the soil, and they were in a class apart from the peace party to the east where "the Copperhead country was characterized by small homesteads, poor soils, and widespread illiteracy."⁸²

There was no "Copperhead country" as such in Iowa. "Peace Democrats" were present in every county. The Copperhead strongholds in Iowa, i. e., where the "Peace Democrats" were able to carry the county in the elections of either 1861, 1863, or 1864, reached from Keokuk to Sioux City. Twenty counties fell into this category, following no geographic pattern whatever. Eight counties were in the southern tier, not more than seventy miles from the Missouri border. Central Iowa harbored eight more, and four were in the northern tier.⁸³ Soil fertility as a factor in determining Copperhead localities fits no yardstick in Iowa, for twelve counties came in the dark-colored silt loam region, and virtually none of the counties was comparable in its soil texture or topography to those of southern Indiana or southeastern Ohio. The presence of newspapers, libraries, schools, and colleges in the Iowa Democratic areas suggests that the literacy rate was comparable to that of other Midwestern communities, although an accurate gauge does not exist. Any attempt to fit the Iowa Copperhead into a die-stamped pattern is futile, however, because of the diverse backgrounds of the men who opposed the war policy. The statistics only show that the hard core of the Copperhead movement was located exactly where one would expect it, in the areas voting Democratic in pre-war Iowa.

⁸⁰ Frank L. Klement, "Middle Western Copperheadism and the Genesis of the Granger Movement," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 38:687 (March, 1952).

⁸¹ Frank L. Klement, "Economic Aspects of Middlewestern Copperheadism," *The Historian*, 14:42 (Autumn, 1951).

⁸² Klement, "Middle Western Copperheadism and the Genesis of the Granger Movement," 680.

⁸³ The twenty counties were: Allamakee, Appanoose, Audubon, Boone, Buena Vista, Calhoun, Davis, Decatur, Dubuque, Fremont, Johnson, Lee, O'Brien, Polk, Marion, Shelby, Sioux, Wapello, Wayne, and Webster.

It is not surprising to note that, generally speaking, war prosperity mounted in Iowa while criticism of Lincoln's administration diminished. Mahony had departed from the *Herald* office in the fall of 1863, leaving the state's principal Copperhead paper in the hands of Stilson Hutchins. Hutchins carried on Mahony's policies but lacked the Irishman's experience and zeal. LeGrand Byington must have been discouraged during the presidential campaign of 1864, when he was corresponding with such "Peace Democrats" as Allen G. Thurman and Fernando Wood, vainly attempting to carry Iowa for McClellan. In August, Byington had called a "peace convention" which met in Iowa City and passed a series of resolutions, including one which declared that the delegates were "opposed to the further prosecution of the war, believing that the Union can be preserved in its integrity by the President agreeing to an armistice, and by calling a National Convention of Sovereign States. . . ." ⁸⁴ The convention and the resolutions were a gesture, just as the minority report of State Senator F. M. Knoll had been in the General Assembly a few months earlier. Objecting to the joint resolution endorsing the Lincoln administration, Knoll wrote that "whilst Mr. Lincoln may be a patriot, he is nevertheless ignorant of the first duties of a patriot, which are respect for and obedience to the laws and constitution of his country." ⁸⁵

Genuine resentment of the Lincoln administration came not only from Copperheads, however. Widespread civilian dissatisfaction expressed at the Iowa polls was overwhelmed by absentee ballots from the army. Although Lincoln lost only ten Iowa counties to McClellan, the soldier vote, which gave the President 17,252 votes to 1,920 for McClellan, swung the balance in many localities. ⁸⁶ Returns from the army camps indicated the rapid headway the Republican party had made among Iowa troops, for the Republican majority had climbed, while the Copperhead opprobrium made the soldier's choice of the Democratic ticket an anomaly. "Vote as you shoot" was the slogan. From here it was only a step for the veterans, with their powerful Grand Army of the Republic, to align themselves with the party that never "fired on our rear."

Following Appomattox, use of the term "Copperhead" in Iowa and the nation might have been expected to cease. Such was not the case. To aid,

⁸⁴ *Iowa City Republican*, Aug. 31, 1864.

⁸⁵ *Senate Journal*, 1864, 367.

⁸⁶ *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, Dec. 7, 1864.

abet, and color the public memory after 1865, several Iowa historians set up or accepted the stereotype of the Iowa Copperhead. S. H. M. Byers, who had served with the Fifth Iowa Infantry and had been a prisoner of war, returned to his home state and in 1888 published *Iowa in War Times*. Byers painted a lurid picture of disloyalty in Iowa. "It was a patient, long-forbearing people in Iowa then, that did not rise in its wrath and swing these worst opponents of their country from the nearest gallows," he wrote. "Possibly, the ignominy that was to follow Iowa 'Copperheads' . . . through life, was a punishment worse than death."⁸⁷ Byers classed as Copperheads those "vagabonds and ruffians out of the old Democratic party, [who] allied themselves with the traitors' camp." Byers' book went into hundreds, possibly thousands, of Iowa homes in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1893 H. W. Lathrop's book, *The Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood*, was published with the approval of the wartime governor. Lathrop, although he described the "vile and venomous treason" of the "home-bred traitors," was less vitriolic than Byers.⁸⁸

More objective than either Byers or Lathrop was Benjamin F. Gue, a politician-newspaperman who had served in the General Assembly during the war. Gue devoted an entire volume to the Civil War in his four-volume *History of Iowa*, published in 1903. He accepted uncritically reports that 30,000 Copperheads had banded together in the Knights of the Golden Circle throughout Iowa, and he accused the Copperheads of misrepresentation, slander, and "falsehoods industriously circulated."⁸⁹ Some treasonable acts were attributed to the Copperheads, but Gue also noted that few Iowans were convicted of treason and that the leading Copperhead editor, Dennis A. Mahony of Dubuque, was a man of "marked ability." When Cyrenus Cole's *A History of the People of Iowa* was published in 1921, the more temperate views of Gue were again offered to readers.⁹⁰ Recent historical works on the Copperhead movement tend to include Iowa somewhat within the Midwestern Copperhead program of the war years, and one writer has concluded that the Southern background or origins of

⁸⁷ Byers, *Iowa in War Times*, 50.

⁸⁸ H. W. Lathrop, *The Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood* (Iowa City, 1893), 238, 240.

⁸⁹ Gue, *History of Iowa*, 2:58, 83.

⁹⁰ Cyrenus Cole, *A History of the People of Iowa* (Cedar Rapids, 1921), 362.

many Iowans accounted for their wartime acts "to help the Confederacy of the South realize its aims."⁹¹

The historian was not alone in his effort to explain the Copperhead species. The fact that "Copperhead" remained in the Iowan's postwar vocabulary strengthens the contention of Democratic editors who accused the Republicans of making political capital out of the expression. LeGrand Byington refused to pay taxes during the war on the ground that the revenues would help support an unconstitutional war. Some of his lands were sold at tax sales, and in the spring of 1866 he was fined \$1,300 and costs for failing to affix revenue stamps to legal documents.⁹² "That's a dear lesson for Mr. Byington!" the *Cedar Valley Times* reported. "This kind of copperheadism *don't pay!*" Byington, who lost a fortune by his intransigence, might have asked what kind *had* paid. After a wayward Republican postmaster was arrested in 1867 for embezzling funds, the *Iowa City State Press* asked readers to consider how the *Des Moines Register* would have reported the affair had the offender been a Democrat. The headlines would have screamed, said the *Press*, "'A Copperhead thief come to grief,' — 'Another rebel sympathizer robbing govt.' — and so on *ad nauseam.*"

It has been the practice, especially of the *State Register*, for years, when a horse was stolen or a crime of any kind committed in any part of the state, to head the item with something akin to the above, and that without knowing or caring what the criminal's political belief was, but acting solely through a wanton desire to cast any slur in its power upon its political opponents. . . .⁹³

Aroused by the demand of a Democrat who wanted an explicit definition of "Copperhead," a Cedar Rapids editor said the expression covered "the almost extinct genus *Democrat*," all who opposed prosecution of the recent war, the K. G. C., those who discouraged the draft, those "who planned the assassination of President Lincoln," and an assortment of other conspiracies. Furthermore, they "are Copperheads who are trying to put more political power into the hands of rebels than that allowed the loyal men . . . [and who] yet co-operates with rebels by endorsing President Johnsons [*sic*] policy. . . ."⁹⁴ When Johnson's break with the Radical Re-

⁹¹ Frank C. Arena, "Southern Sympathizers in Iowa During Civil War Period," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 30:538 (January, 1951).

⁹² Cedar Rapids *Cedar Valley Times*, April 5, 1866.

⁹³ *Iowa City State Press*, June 12, 1867.

⁹⁴ Cedar Rapids *Cedar Valley Times*, Sept. 27, 1866.

publicans became obvious, Iowa newspapers assailed him as a Copperhead. So it appeared that "Copperhead" was indeed the catch-all phrase the Cedar Rapids editor believed it to be.⁹⁵

And it was a persistent curse on the Democratic party. By 1872 the Democrats, minority that they had become in Iowa, were disgusted with their opponents' tactics of "waving the bloody shirt," shouting Copperhead, and pointing a stern finger at the Democrats. A Sioux City editor asked:

Can't some inventive Radical [Republican] coin some new word or term to harp on. "Rebel Democracy" — although at one time a God send for loud-mouthed stumpers, is getting nauseous with people who, believing in the restoration of the Union, don't want to battle with nothing more than a past shadow and a present myth.⁹⁶

The efficacy of the "Copperhead" chant was nonetheless obvious. The Republican monopoly of state and federal offices became almost complete, forcing any Democratic politician with serious ambitions either to renounce his affiliation or move to another state.⁹⁷

Then something happened. Grover Cleveland was elected president in 1884. The followers of Jeff Davis had at last triumphed, the *Iowa State Register* lamented, and an editorial asked "Aren't the greys on deck again!" "Is not there a good deal of hypocrisy [sic] in this simulated rage by the Republicans at the mention of Jeff Davis' name," the *Dubuque Herald* rejoined. "His name is nothing now — except a bugaboo to these Republicans." Still using what some Democrats contended was "the old saw, new set," the state's leading newspaper now alluded to the Northern Democrats in Congress as Copperheads. "The Copperhead among men was and is like Kentucky among the states," the *Register* declared, "as mean as any one during the war, and a good deal meaner than any one

⁹⁵ Occasionally the Democrats defied their opponents by flaunting the detested word as the title of a newspaper. The *Pella Copperhead* was outspoken in its opposition to the Republicans from 1866 until 1868, when the plant was moved and the newspaper became the *Ottumwa Copperhead*. The name was changed to the *Ottumwa Democrat* in 1870 or 1871. See Winifred Gregory (ed.), *American Newspapers, 1821-1936* (New York, 1937), 180-81; *Pella Chronicle*, May 8, 1930.

⁹⁶ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, July 20, 1872.

⁹⁷ It is interesting to note the use of the phrase, "a former Democrat," in the biographical section of many county and state histories printed between 1865 and 1900. For example, see Andrews, *Pioneers of Polk County*, 2:133, 154, 316.

since, because he was never whipped."⁹⁸ The practice of still calling Democrats "Copperheads" was not uniform with Iowa's Republican newspapers, however. That the term died a slow death is evidenced, on the other hand, by the *Register's* reference to Cleveland's second administration — "The present conscript, copperhead, and rebel administration." The date was February 22, 1895.

Indeed, the odium attached to the word "Copperhead" was such that the Republicans never went so far as to apply the hated label to one of their own party when the man was accused of apostasy. It took a complete switch of allegiance to complete the process. In 1877 President Hayes's policy regarding the South brought down on his head the scorn of most Iowa Republicans. They accused him of trickery, dishonesty, and backsliding, but not Copperheadism. Its patience worn thin, the *Des Moines Register* simply scorned Hayes as "the man without a party."⁹⁹

To assess the role of Iowa Copperheads during the Civil War with finality would require special, separate studies of the outstanding characters involved, the court records, newspapers, and the contemporary opinions as discerned through diary accounts and letters. The best evidence indicates that the Iowans who wished the Confederacy well were few indeed, and there were still fewer who actually did commit acts that could be construed as treasonable. True enough, the sons of former Governor Hempstead and Senator Jones did serve under the Confederate flag, but their cases were the exception and not the rule. Though the word "Copperhead" did not come into use in Iowa until the war was well under way, it was an expression that aptly covered real and alleged "fifth column" activity in Iowa. As a shibboleth in Republican hands it was used as a political weapon until the end of the century, long after the expression had any genuine basis in fact.

The Iowa Copperhead, with a few exceptions, was not a traitor or a Southern sympathizer, and there were probably as many Iowa Copperheads from foreign lands as there were from Southern areas. Bushwhackers and freebooters up from Missouri were a definite problem, but in the heat and passion of the war there was little effort to distinguish honest critics from outright traitors or invaders. Hence the word "Copperhead" was soon used to heap scorn on anti-administration elements, "draft dodgers,"

⁹⁸ *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, Jan. 23, 1885.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Sept. 28, 1877.

deserters, anti-Negro groups, vagrants, and, incidentally, convicted traitors. Guilty at times of extremism, the only charge that could be validly applied to Mahony, Byington, Mason, Jones, Sheward, Claggett, Hutchins, and the rest was that they would not conform to a pattern of administration support. They were conservatives, at a time when conservatism was decried by zealous patriots as treason. They were for the status quo. They were the losers. Iowa's Copperheads have been under a cloud for almost a century because the histories of their era were written by the winners.