

SOURCE MATERIAL OF IOWA HISTORY

IOWA POLITICAL SKETCHES

By David Brant

[In 1917 David Brant, editor of the *Iowa City Republican*, was sixty-seven years old. He had had a long career as editor of several Iowa newspapers, had served one term in the Iowa legislature, and had known intimately most of the leading politicians of the state. Many urged him to write a political history of Iowa, but since he did not feel equal to that task, he began the publication of a series of sketches of some of the outstanding political events of the past to which he had been a witness. These articles continued intermittently during 1917 and 1918 and are a source of much firsthand material on the political maneuvering and intriguing during the late nineteenth century. David Brant died in 1919. His sketches were reprinted in 1926 in the *Cedar Rapids Republican*, a paper he had edited before going to the *Iowa City Republican*. The following sketch tells of the squabble over the fourth election of William Boyd Allison to the United States Senate. Since Brant was an observer at the legislative session which elected Allison, his article gives a personal account of the event. It first appeared in the July 19, 1917, issue of the *Iowa City Republican*, and was later reprinted in the *Cedar Rapids Republican* for March 7, 1926. As space permits, more of Brant's articles will be published in the JOURNAL. David Brant was the father of the modern biographer, Irving Brant, who has written several volumes on James Madison. — EDITOR.]

TWO VOTES SAVED ALLISON

"May God strike me dumb if in answering roll call I ever cast my vote for William B. Allison for United States senator." Such, in substance, were the words of Senator George L. Finn of Taylor county, written after the election of 1889 to Senator Bayliss of Clayton county, a democrat. I saw the letter during the session of the legislature that followed. In it Senator Finn declared that it would be a public calamity to re-elect Senator Allison. He referred to the great wealth the senator was supposed to have accumulated, his connection with corporations, his failure to secure free coinage of silver and his absenteeism from the state.

In the election of 1889, Horace Boies had defeated Senator [Joseph] Hutchinson for governor, and the legislature was so close politically, that

the house was a tie and the republicans had but two majority in the senate. In the legislature there were two members elected as Union Labor party candidates, Senator Perry Engle of Jasper and Matt Ewart of Poweshiek. Both had had the support of the democratic party. In addition four had been elected as independents. But all had been elected in opposition to the republican candidates, and none of them could be counted upon to vote for Senator Allison.

A year prior to this an estrangement had taken place between Senator Allison and Governor Larrabee, which had an important bearing upon the senatorial election. It will be recalled that President Harrison had tendered the position of secretary of the treasury to Senator Allison, which finally was declined. Newspaper correspondents in Washington asserted that one of the reasons for the declination was what was termed the uncertainty of the political situation in Iowa, especially relating to the appointment of Senator Allison's successor which would have been in the hands of Governor Larrabee. This may have been gossip, but it was never denied by Senator Allison, and as a number of his closest friends were not cordial with the governor, the latter assumed it was the feeling of the senator.

In his sixteen years service as state senator Governor Larrabee had always been a strong supporter of Senator Allison. He had always been a warm friend of Col. D. B. Henderson, later speaker of the house. It was understood at the time that Senator Allison would have been pleased, had he retired, to have had Col. Henderson appointed to the senate. In a conversation at the time with Gov. Larrabee, he told me that Senator Allison and his friends had no reason to doubt whom he would appoint, and that at the time Senator Allison was hesitating about accepting the cabinet position, he had his own mind made up as to whom he would appoint. The man was Col. Henderson.

Gov. Larrabee had been active in securing the passage of the Iowa railway laws adopted by the Twenty-second General Assembly, and this made him many friends, who were anxious to see him in the United States Senate. Those who had undertaken to secure the defeat of Senator Allison, naturally turned to Governor Larrabee as the available man.

At the time of the election in 1889 I was editor of the *Walker News*, in Linn county, and had cordial personal, but not political, relations with Fred Faulkes, the erratic, but irrepressible, editor of the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*. Soon after the election Mr. Faulkes opened a hard fight upon Senator Alli-

son, and he assumed that with the defection of two republicans, which would defeat Senator Allison, there was no question as to the outcome. Mr. Faulkes sent for me, and calling upon him I learned that he wanted me to go to Des Moines and represent the *Gazette* during the legislative session. He showed me letters from Senator Finn, in which he said that he had the positive pledges of three members of the house never to vote for Senator Allison. Finn was for Governor Larrabee himself, and in his opinion, there was no question of three other republicans and all the democrats and independents voting for him. In addition, Mr. Faulkes had letters from many republicans expressing opposition to Senator Allison and favoring the governor. As these letters were personal to Mr. Faulkes, I do not feel at liberty to disclose their authors. I suggested to Mr. Faulkes that men who were opposing Senator Allison only under strict secrecy, would not be very effective. Those familiar with the ways of politics are not surprised when . . . most of these men turned up at Des Moines . . . as Allison supporters.

For a couple of years Allison had been under the fire of General [James B.] Weaver and other extremists, who charged that he was the enemy of the people and the supporter of monopolies and corporations. In a preceding campaign, General Weaver had trailed the leading republican speakers and would follow them with a meeting at each place visited. I heard him at a big rally at Independence, where in the afternoon Col. Henderson, Frank D. Jackson and Buren R. Sherman, former governor, were the speakers. The moment the meeting closed, General Weaver announced that he would answer the speakers at the same place that evening. Somebody asked him if he intended to appropriate the platform and seats placed in the park by the republicans. General Weaver said that the park was a public place and that if the platform and seats were there they might be used. The republicans finally tendered General Weaver the use of the platform and seats.

In his speech that evening, General Weaver reviewed the public service of Senator Allison, charging him with being an enemy of silver coinage, the supporter of corporations, in direct connection with railways as director in two companies, and declared that on a salary, then only \$3,500, he had amassed a great fortune. The impression made by General Weaver was such that Col. Hepburn was called to Independence to make reply. The result was that any city in Iowa having a big rally, was assured a speech from General Weaver and another one later from Col. [William Peters] Hepburn. My recollection is that this occurred in 1888.

After hearing all the speaking at all three meetings at Independence, I was impressed with the feeling that General Weaver had the best of the round. His charges were not answered. Praise for Allison, a recounting of his public services and other generalities left a bad impression. The people wanted to know about that great wealth said to have been amassed and his connections with the corporations. More will be said about these matters later.

When the legislature convened in January, 1900 [*sic.* 1890] Horace Boies was ready to be inaugurated, but the house was fifty and fifty and nothing could be done until it was organized, which was not until the last days of February, and the vote on senator was not taken until March 4.

When starting for Des Moines I carried the assurance of Mr. Faulkes that I would find in Senator Finn a man of courage, devotion and honesty. I also carried a letter of introduction to the Taylor county senator which gave the assurance from Mr. Faulkes that I was reliable and would not "leak" confidences, etc. I had read of Finn who had been active in railway legislation at two previous sessions, but I had never met him. I was not impressed favorably and I soon learned that many members of the legislature were not fully convinced of his staying qualities, to speak mildly.

I soon learned that the three members of the house claimed to be pledged to vote against Allison and for some other republican, were Paschall of Taylor, Ball of Jefferson and Shipley of Guthrie. The last named was undoubtedly involved in the conspiracy, but I know of nothing but report relative to Ball and Paschall. But there is no question that the republican leaders were fearful of the results and kept close watch of the situation. As the opposition to Allison centered around issues in which the farmers were deeply interested, the republicans called in Tama Jim Wilson to manage the Allison campaign, and later the senator himself came and spent a couple of weeks in Des Moines.

One of the early letters I sent out on the political situation, reviewed the grounds of opposition to Allison, mention naturally being made of his alleged wealth and his official relations to corporations. This reached the eyes of the senator and he sent for me to call at his room. I was received most cordially and Allison assured me that he had no doubt of my honesty, etc., but he wanted to assure me that I was far from the facts. He then went on to say that he wanted to tell me for my own information about his property and his corporation connections. In the frankest possible manner

he itemized his personal holdings with as much care as though I had been the assessor. He said that he had a home in Washington, the old Senator Grimes home, inherited from Senator Grimes by his, Allison's first wife, who was the daughter of Senator Grimes. [sic. Actually, Allison's wife was Mrs. Grimes's niece, who had been adopted by Senator Grimes. Also, she was Allison's second, not his first, wife.] He then turned to Dubuque where he said all his other property was located. He said that he had his home there, worth I think he said, about \$7,500, and some business property. Also a small amount of bank stock. He said about the time he entered the senate he signed notes with a friend, who later failed in business and he had to assume the notes. To secure him his friend deeded him some business properties, encumbered by mortgages, Allison said; that for many years he had to save from his salary to help pay interest and taxes and pay something each year on the notes, as the rental income was not large. But later, as Dubuque developed, these properties increased in value and at the time of this conversation, they were bringing him in considerable net income, but even then the last of those indorsed notes had not been paid.

"There," said the senator, "is all there is to my great wealth."

"Now," said the senator, "I will tell you about my railway connections. Several years ago J. P. Farley was trying to promote a railway west from Dubuque. He asked me to take a little stock and to accept a place on the board of directors. I invested a hundred dollars. It was a purely local organization, backed by Dubuque men, such as were common in those days." The senator then told of another instance where he acted in a similar capacity with his fellow Dubuque citizens, the details of which I have forgotten but the road was never built.

The senator then discussed the charges that he had absented himself from the state and was not loyal to his own people. He seemed to feel this insinuation more deeply than the other charges. He admitted that possibly he had been negligent, but he said that he had once been charged with attempting to manipulate the affairs of the party, which he did not want to do. He said that calls of the national and state committees to speak in close states, accounted for his short time in recent Iowa campaigns.

I told the senator that I had assumed these charges to be true in a measure, because there had never been any denial, and suggested that his statement ought to be made public. At first he objected, saying that he did not like to have his private affairs brought to public attention, but finally he

consented, and I sent out to my papers his answer to the charges made by General Weaver and others, and which many had assumed were true. I have no doubt but General Weaver had been misled, as such charges against Allison and other public men were common in certain eastern publications at that time. That was a time when many men were in the United States senate on account of their wealth rather than on account of ability or fitness. Allison's name had appeared in the list of senatorial millionaires.

These things all have close relations with what happened or did not happen that winter in Des Moines. They showed the grounds upon which many members of the legislature based opposition to the senator and who were ready, if opportunity presented itself, to vote for some other person than Allison, provided it did not imperil their own standing as republicans.

During the days following the opening of the legislature numerous conferences were held to organize the Allison opposition. They all to a greater or less extent, centered around the possibility of electing Governor Larrabee. It was assumed that all the democrats and independents would vote for the governor, provided at least two republicans would do the same. Senator Finn kept up a stiff front and at all times declared he had the votes, four of them, three besides himself. For a couple of weeks everything went smoothly, but about that time there appeared in Des Moines some democrats who were disposed to throw a monkey wrench into the opposition machine. The first to appear was Alexander Charles, a prominent democrat from Cedar Rapids. Then came George Paul, former member of the house from Johnson county. He had been instrumental in breaking the deadlock in the grange session of the house [1874], which elected John H. Gear for speaker, bringing into notice one of the most successful politicians the state has ever known. To these two was added later Gil Johnson from Jackson county. They had not been there long until there began to be heard opposition from democrats. They could not see why they should be used to pull somebody's chestnuts from the hot ashes. The first definite break that came was when Senator W. O. Schmidt and the two members of the house from Scott county declared that under no circumstances would they vote for Governor Larrabee. As Finn had pledged but four votes and here was a defection of three democrats, he was forced to take another turn.

Following this development, I received a telegram from Mr. Faulkes, to see Judge J. H. Rothrock of the supreme court, and ascertain if he would accept the election as senator. I conferred with the judge, who at first said

that if he should be elected without making any effort or being a candidate, he would accept. Judge Rothrock appeared to be acceptable to the opposition to Allison, but a few days later, he informed a legislative committee, that he would not accept an election and that his name must not be used.

Things then quieted down, and it looked as though the opponents of Allison had given up the contest, but a new man was suggested. He was A. B. Cummins, now senior senator from Iowa. The democrats accepted this movement with some signs of enthusiasm and it looked as though it might be successful. I never knew the inside of this movement or just who started it, my first information relative to it coming from Col. H. Gatch, senator from Polk county. He said that some of his Des Moines friends were bringing much pressure to bear upon him to support Cummins on account of the prominence it would give Des Moines to have one of the senators. The Cummins boom lasted but a short time. Finn was on hand with his four votes but again three democrats came to the rescue of Allison. They were Senator Shields and the two members of the house from Dubuque. They announced that if it was to become a question of municipal pride, Dubuque had as much of that quality as had the city of Des Moines, therefore they had decided they would vote for no republican other than Senator Allison. If the republican deflection would vote for a democrat, they would vote for a democrat, but if it was to be a republican, it would be Allison so far as the Dubuque delegation was concerned.

At this point, Senator Finn apparently gave up the fight. It would be necessary for him to secure five republican bolters to overcome the Dubuque opposition, and the five he could not secure.

About this time there was evidence that somebody was traveling over the state working up a movement to enlist the farmers against Senator Allison. F. W. Meyer, of Ida county, a leader in the Farmers Alliance, came to Des Moines to oppose the senator. Letters began to come in from farmers expressing opposition, but they all were of one tenor, indicating that one person had inspired them. Then flowed in resolutions from the alliances, reciting the General Weaver charges, and asking members of the legislature to vote for Governor Larrabee. The Farmers Alliance had been an effective agent under the direction of N. B. Ashby, son-in-law of Henry Wallace, then editor of the *Homestead*, in the election of Horace Boies, with many members in the state.

Just what connection those interests had in the next move to defeat Sen-

ator Allison, I do not know, but events indicated they were on the ground floor, as it was while Mr. Meyer was in the city that the last effort culminated.

I received the first intimation of this movement from Governor Larrabee. He said that a number of republicans had asked him to enter the republican caucus, and that in event of his defeat, they would bolt the caucus on roll call and vote for him. The governor's answer was that if he went into a caucus, he must abide by its decision, as he was a republican, and was governor by virtue of the republican party.

The next proposal was that they would not enter the republican caucus but would vote for the governor. They would not ask co-operation of the democrats. This would result in a deadlock.

A few days after this plan was organized, a conference of the dissenting republicans was held at the state house. Governor Larrabee was in his office and received their proposals. One of the bolters claimed they had about thirty present, but the number was much less, possibly fifteen. After their plan had been submitted to Governor Larrabee, I saw him in his office, and we walked down the street a half a block to his home. He related what had been submitted to him and asked, "what do you think of it?"

I replied that the only result would be the defeat of both him and Senator Allison. If such a contest was developed, party interests would prevail and in the interest of harmony, somebody other than either of them would be elected.

He said something like this, "I would be their cat's paw. They want to beat Allison. Several of them are against him because they or their friends have been disappointed about appointments. I am to give them my answer in the morning. It will be that I will have nothing to do with the senatorship. I will not permit the use of my name in any way."

That ended the fight on Senator Allison. On the fourth day of March he was elected senator for the fourth time. In the senate when the vote was taken, Senator Finn made a long speech, recounting the magnificent services of the Iowa senator, and he cast his vote for Senator Allison, despite his call upon God to make him speechless. Reports were common about the state house that the Taylor county senator was retained at \$1,500, through Ed Knott, United States marshal, to appear in behalf of the defendant, in the case of Finn et al vs William B. Allison. But that probably was a rumor.

On the ballot for senator, Allison received the vote of Dr. McDermid,

independent, from Adair county. The following voted for Larrabee, Senators Engle of Jasper and Barnett of Warren and Representatives Ewart of Poweshiek, Gates of Floyd, Craesser of Ida, Smith of Boone, Roe of Monona, Russell of Adams, all independents or labor union party men, except Russell of Adams, a democrat. The democrats voted for S. L. Bestow of Lucas. Senator Allison received four majority on joint ballot.

While there was some resentment among the republicans relative to the part played by Governor Larrabee, I know of nothing that transpired that was inconsistent as a party man, in fact he bore his party with dignity and honor. He would have appreciated a clean election to the United States senate, and who would not, but he was never ready to accept an election that would be in any way questionable.

The people of Iowa learned something new about Senator Allison. They learned that for several years he had borne with personal attacks without giving them the dignity of a denial, possibly a mistake, but when the people learned the facts, they loved the man more than ever. In fact it was in his later years that the people had real affection for their great senator.

Five years later many looked upon Senator Allison as the most available man for the republican nomination for the presidency by his party. When the discussion of his possibilities was becoming wide, during his speaking campaign in the fall of 1895, I made an appointment to meet him in Dubuque to secure material for a review of his public services. This first appeared in the Cedar Rapids *Gazette*, and later in New York and other eastern papers. The senator expressed deep appreciation that the newspaper which once had fought him the hardest of any in Iowa, should be the first to make extended mention of his possible candidacy. When the party at St. Louis turned to William McKinley, it was because of no lack of appreciation of the fitness of the Iowa man. [Iowa City *Republican*, July 19, 1917.]