

## HENRY A. AND GEORGE D. PERKINS IN THE CAMPAIGN OF 1860

Early in the winter of 1860 two young newspapermen, associated with the Baraboo (Wisconsin) *Republic*, came to a decision, important to them and epoch-making for the State of Iowa. This determination brought to Cedar Falls and later to Sioux City two brothers, Henry A. and George Douglas Perkins.

Though still young, they had already mastered the printing trade in the school of experience, and both had secured a liberal education by exploring on their own initiative every pathway that could enlarge their outlook upon politics, literature, and life. As editors, printers, and publishers they were to dominate the political and social thinking in the State of their adoption for a half century. The influence of George D. Perkins extended beyond the *Sioux City Journal* to the legislative halls in Des Moines and Washington, D. C.

Henry A. Perkins had entered the printing office of the Baraboo *Republic* at sixteen. There he had become an expert in the handsetting of type and later had been admitted to a partnership with the owner, A. N. Kellogg. In his early teens, George D. Perkins also began to set type, to do cub reporting, and, on occasion, to try his hand at editorials. In 1855, when he was fifteen, he considered himself fortunate to earn a dollar a week, but five years later, when his brother sold his interest in the Baraboo *Republic*, George D. had acquired what then seemed to him a munificence, a journeyman's wage of a dollar a day.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Mr. Perkins' Own Story of his Life" in *George D. Perkins, 1840-1914*, p. 17.



Henry A. and George D. Perkins had been born at Holly, Orleans County, New York, H. A. in 1836, and George D. in 1840. Their father had been a lawyer whose health failed. In hopes of finding a more desirable climate, he migrated with his family to the prairies of Indiana, and then to Baraboo, Wisconsin, where he died in 1852, leaving his wife with four children to care for. With the determination of the pioneer mother, she made every sacrifice to keep her little family of two boys and two younger girls together.

Only after many family discussions had the decision to migrate from Baraboo to the Iowa prairies been reached. The financing of the undertaking presented the chief obstacle, for it meant the uprooting of the entire family. Poverty, such as almost uniformly beset the pioneers of the Middle West, had faced the Perkins family for nearly ten years. The resolute mother had already participated in establishing her family in the two new States of Indiana and Wisconsin; but in the winter of 1859-1860, when she perceived her sons' desire to build up an editorial partnership in the newer prairies of Iowa, she was ready to begin life in a third and newer Commonwealth. She even lent the encouragement of her indomitable spirit to the new enterprise. She aided in the disposal of their few household goods and, with the help of Henry's young wife, chose the bedding, clothing, and the household furnishings, deemed absolutely necessary for the venture.

After the decision had been made, Henry, the junior partner in the Baraboo *Republic*, sold his interest to A. N. Kellogg and invested all that he could spare in the purchase of a modern printing press, strong rag paper, and a supply of good printer's ink. By February of 1860 the Perkins family was ready for its hundred and fifty-mile trek across the snow-drifted prairies to Cedar Falls.

The two young men — H. A., as he came to be called, then



twenty-four, and George D., who would reach his twentieth birthday on February 29, 1860 — chose to locate in Cedar Falls, with the firm intention of editing and publishing a Republican newspaper. How much preknowledge they possessed of the new site cannot now be ascertained, but if they had been searching for a community where the Republican Party dominated local politics, they had been rightly directed. They found on the Cedar, one hundred miles west of Dubuque, a village boasting of fifteen hundred people which was still thirty miles from a railroad. They found also a community whose leading citizens realized their need of a newspaper.

The Perkins brothers named their paper the *Cedar Falls Gazette*. For their printing establishment they chose ground-floor rooms in the three-story Overman building. On the floor above them they soon aided in establishing the local Republican headquarters. On this same floor the Horticultural and Literary Society had already established itself and had for over a year been holding fortnightly agricultural exhibits and forums. Here, too, the Society had built up a subscription library of several hundred volumes. Across the street stood the Western Hotel built of red brick, also three stories in height. It was flanked on one side by Andrew Mullarky's general store and on the other by the post office. From the windows of their editorial sanctum, H. A. and George D. Perkins could see the stage halt at the covered stoop of the Western House each evening and unload passengers from the east. Early the next morning they could see people clamber into other coaches bound for Fort Dodge or Nashua, or for Cedar Rapids, and they could hear the shrill horn and the crack of each driver's whip as he started his four horses on a gallop.

On March 16, 1860, after several busy weeks and many conferences, H. A. and George D. Perkins issued the first



number of the *Cedar Falls Gazette*. The brothers had chosen to issue their paper on Friday afternoons. Three weeks later they proudly reprinted exchange comments from the Iowa press which complimented them upon the "masterly" set-up of their four-page seven-column paper, its clear print, and upon the clarity and tone of its news and editorial columns.<sup>2</sup>

The initial number of the *Cedar Falls Gazette* included a "Salutatory" and a "Prospectus" in which the editors formally introduced themselves to their new public. This "Salutatory" modestly and frankly set forth their editorial intentions. It began, "Strangers in your midst, we labor under many difficulties in our position as public journalists, on account of not having a thorough knowledge of the country, its wants, etc. Yet we come with a strong determination to work with a will for your interests, to leave no honorable means untried to enhance your prosperity, promote your interests and give prosperity to the many natural and artificial advantages unto which this point [village] is favored."<sup>3</sup>

The two brothers accepted mutual responsibility and frequently interchanged work, but, for the most part, H. A. assumed the business management and "set up" the paper while George D. gave his time to reportorial and editorial duties. From the outset the news items and editorials printed in the *Gazette* were copiously quoted by the Iowa press; but publishing a paper without financial reserves was a difficult task. Often the Perkins brothers advertised their willingness to accept a cord of hickory wood or a supply of potatoes or hens in lieu of the two-dollar annual subscription to the *Gazette*.

<sup>2</sup> See exchanges in the numbers of the *Cedar Falls Gazette* for April, 1860, and "Mr. Perkins' Own Story of his Life" in *George D. Perkins, 1840-1914*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, March 16, 1860.



During the five years of his work on the *Cedar Falls Gazette* George D. Perkins served his real apprenticeship. In this period, broken by his enlistment in the army and a long period of hospitalization, he matured from a stripling of twenty to an editor of twenty-five. Prominent among his editorial virtues stood out his insistence upon accuracy, his clear-sighted vision, and his determination to separate fact from opinion.<sup>4</sup> Both brothers brought from Wisconsin to Iowa the pioneer's belief in democracy and a buoyant faith in progress and in the future of the West. H. A. and George D. Perkins furthermore exhibited a genuine interest in people, in current events — both local and national — and possessed the power of directing public thought.

Out of the discipline imposed by the experiences of their youth with its financial hardships, H. A. and George D. Perkins learned to rely upon themselves for their livelihood and for their convictions. They early learned to take advantage of every opportunity which the small towns of Baraboo and Cedar Falls afforded. As one of George D. Perkins' contemporaries later remarked, "The old newspaper printing office became a veritable university to him".<sup>5</sup> He read history, particularly American history, as systematically as the available supply of books permitted. Although he never studied higher mathematics or the classical languages, he never discounted their value. Capitalizing on a natural gift for reporting, he acquired a facile and vivid style in reportorial and editorial writing. He possessed a keen eye for details and for the significance of detail in relation to human life — whether it were the tone of a political speech, the expression of a thought, or an

<sup>4</sup> "George D. Perkins", *Sioux City Journal*, February 4, 1914. This memorial editorial was written by Edward D. Heiser.

<sup>5</sup> "Mr. Perkins' Own Story of his Life" in *George D. Perkins, 1840-1914*, p. 7.



account of a pound party given for an impoverished Baptist pastor.

The year 1860, with a presidential election in the offing, gave the Perkins brothers ample opportunity to examine the issues at stake and to influence their patrons. A study of the *Cedar Falls Gazette* for their first twelve months as editors shows that they tackled the undertaking with sincerity and with logical astuteness, and steered a moderate and thoughtful course. On the practical side of politics they never voluntarily missed a local caucus or a county convention.

Republican by antecedents, preference, and conviction, H. A. and George D. Perkins determined to make the *Cedar Falls Gazette* a simon-pure Republican paper. They assiduously printed detailed political news as it arrived belatedly by stage, based as it had to be largely on excerpts from eastern papers. They were forced to rely heavily upon the *Dubuque Times* (Republican) and the *Dubuque Herald* (Democratic), for the nearest telegraph had but recently reached Dubuque. If sleet and snowstorms did not delay rail traffic to Jessup, or mud or snow did not hold up the stage from there on, the editors could receive and utilize news items from the east which were not more than forty-eight hours old. In times of excitement they anticipated the modern extra by issuing one-page handbills.

They punctiliously announced all approaching local caucuses as well as county, State, congressional, and national conventions. Of these the Republican National Convention of 1860 overshadowed all others in interest. For the first time in the history of the United States a national nominating convention was to be held as far west as Chicago. It was to assemble on May 16th in the huge frame Wigwam which Chicago had erected for this meeting.



At the time of the preceding national election in 1856, Cedar Falls had been a diminutive trading center with homes clustering about an excellent mill site. It had then claimed four hundred residents. Its nearest rail connection lay at Dyersville, seventy miles east. At that time the majority of voters had been too busy with sod potatoes, snaithes, cradles, and breaking plows to be deeply concerned as to whether Buchanan or Fremont was elected.

When H. A. and George D. Perkins arrived in Cedar Falls in the spring of 1860, the village had been without a newspaper since H. C. Hartman had carried off the Cedar Falls *Banner* in a bobsled in December, 1858, and set up his press in Waterloo. Cedar Falls was largely Republican and the majority of the progressive men of the village rallied to the support of the new paper.

The official "Prospectus" which had appeared for the first time on March 16th on the front page of the first number was reprinted conspicuously in every issue of the *Gazette* down to November, when Abraham Lincoln was elected. It set forth the Republican stand of the *Gazette* in the following words: "Firmly and conscientiously believing that the principles of the Republican Party as enumerated in the Philadelphia Platform of 1856 are above all others best calculated to promote the vital interests of the country and to secure 'the greatest number the greatest good', we shall unflinchingly advocate its doctrines and labor earnestly for its success." In this "Prospectus" they furthermore asserted their disapproval of the current administration, of Federal corruption, and of every movement which could possibly be interpreted as a wedge in the extension of slavery. They staunchly affirmed their belief in an efficient public economy, in the rights of States to be free from invasion, in the admission of Kansas as a free State, and they asserted the supremacy of the Constitution.



When the Perkins brothers began their editorial work in Iowa in March, 1860, they were eagerly looking forward to the Republican National Convention which was to meet in May. With their habitual western buoyancy, they declared that the coming convention would "find itself compelled to nominate the foremost of living Americans, the wisest and most national of our statesmen, the most sagacious, yet the most dignified of politicians, and the calmest and steadiest of them in the long battle against the encroachment of slavery". Their first choice of a candidate was William H. Seward. They considered him a statesman of the first order, a man "who understood the traits of the American people" and whose foreign policy they approved. Very significantly, however, they added that in the coming campaign the Republican ticket would not be weakened in the least by the nomination of Abraham Lincoln of Illinois for the vice presidency.<sup>6</sup> In their second issue, they prophesied the success of the Republican Party at the November polls.

Early in April, partly to augment the flattened state of their pocket books and partly to stimulate interest in the campaign, the editors offered the *Gazette* to new patrons from May 13th to November 15th for fifty cents.<sup>7</sup> As often as Friday came and the printers devils lifted the acrid-smelling and damp papers from the press, every patron could acquaint himself with the Republican issues which the editors felt would necessarily affect every man and woman in the country. The Republicans were duty bound — so the *Gazette* instructed them: (1) to oppose the present administration; (2) to oppose Federal corruption and usurpation; (3) to oppose the extension of slavery into the territories; (4) to oppose the reopening of the African slave trade; (5) to oppose inequality of rights among citizens;

<sup>6</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, March 30, 1860.

<sup>7</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, April 6, 1860.



(6) to admit Kansas as a free State; (7) to restore economy of Federal administration; (8) to maintain inviolate the rights of States; (9) to defend the soil of every State and Territory from lawless invasion; and (10) to maintain the supremacy of the Constitution.<sup>8</sup>

Not only did the Perkins brothers urge the Republican voters to action, but strong Republican citizens acted as stimuli upon them, men like Peter Melendy, Colonel W. H. Sessions, Caleb May, and F. N. Chase. Two weeks before the convention met in the Chicago Wigwam, the Perkins brothers published an editorial headed by the imperative verb, "Organize". They noted that Cedar Falls was lagging behind other towns in the State since one hundred and forty Republican clubs had already organized for action in other places. The *Gazette* asked for local leadership in Cedar Falls and for the immediate formation of a Republican Club. The editors considered it inadvisable to wait until the eleventh hour to organize because they considered it foolhardy to dream of convincing voters on the eve of election "in a short period of frantic exertions". "The true policy of the Republican Party", they declared, is to enlighten the public mind, and to accomplish this thoroughly and effectively, time was necessary. The editorial continued, "we want to see an efficient working club organized here." They also urged that the Republican Clubs throughout the Cedar Valley from Vinton to Charles City should hold a series of public gatherings and publish and circulate campaign literature.

Using the slogan, "Organize", they urged the Republicans of Cedar Falls to establish an active local club. They believed that the members would work toward greater efficiency if they should strive to appeal to reason and not to prejudice. The important thing was to place before voters

<sup>8</sup> The "Prospectus" in the *Cedar Falls Gazette*, March 16 to November 9, 1860.



the idea that the coming election represented not a war between two great factions for political triumph alone, but an "irrepressible conflict". All citizens should realize that a conflict between right and wrong lay in the offing, and upon the triumph of the right depended the liberties, prosperity, and happiness of the American people.

Young as George D. and H. A. Perkins were, they chose to urge a thoughtful consideration of issues rather than to encourage anything that savored of perfervid or hysterical political maneuvers. They declared: "We want to see the work commenced forthwith; place the principles and objects of the two parties side by side, and then place them in the hands of the people and tell them to read them, compare them carefully, to weigh impartially the issues set forth, and then judge for themselves which they will endorse with their ballot. . . . Truth, Justice, and Humanity are with us, and we can prove it to every sensible, reflecting mind, and that is all that is necessary."<sup>9</sup>

A week before the National Republican Convention, the *Gazette* expressed the opinion that Iowa delegates would be instructed to vote for William H. Seward, but the leading editorial stated that if any candidate appeared who could succeed better in unifying and solidifying the party, the *Gazette* stood ready to lend him its influence.<sup>10</sup>

Saturday, May 12th, twenty-four hours after the *Gazette's* call for organization of a local Republican Club, a group of Cedar Falls men, including H. A. and George D. Perkins, organized a Republican Club and appointed committees to prepare a constitution and by-laws, and to nominate a slate of officers who could be elected the following Saturday evening, May 19, 1860.

<sup>9</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, May 4, 1860.

<sup>10</sup> "Republican National Convention" in the *Cedar Falls Gazette*, May 11, 1860.



The National Republican Convention assembled in the Chicago Wigwam on Wednesday morning, May 16th. That week the *Gazette* office, with the assistance of the *Dubuque Times*, the telegraph, the Dubuque and Sioux City Railroad, and the stagecoach, did its best to keep Main Street of Cedar Falls informed of progress. In a preferential ballot, the Iowa delegation, headed by William Penn Clark, gave seven votes for Seward and eight for Lincoln,<sup>11</sup> out of twenty-five delegates present. Early news of the convention indicated that Seward or Lincoln would receive the nomination for President.

On Saturday night, May 19th, twenty-four hours after the *Gazette* had gone to press, the news arrived by stage that Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin had been nominated. Although pranksters, supposedly Democratic, spiked the mouth of the village cannon, this did not dampen the ardor of the Republicans who yelled themselves breathless and threw fire balls. Later the hoarse yet still excited leaders filed into the schoolhouse to complete the organization of the Republican Club, and after hearing the report of the nominating committee, the Club elected Col. W. H. Sessions, president, J. J. Layman and Caleb May, vice presidents, H. A. Perkins, secretary, and John Kerr, treasurer.<sup>12</sup> The members unanimously named their organization the Lincoln and Hamlin Club.

Before the end of May the *Gazette* had printed all the nineteen planks in the platform adopted in the Chicago Wigwam and in subsequent issues, it repeatedly empha-

<sup>11</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, May 18, 1860. This "straw" vote stood — Seward 7, Lincoln 8, Bates 4, Cameron 4, Chase 1, and McLean 1. Iowa had eight votes in the convention but sent thirty-two delegates. At the first roll call the Iowa delegation gave Edward Bates, Simon Cameron, Salmon P. Chase, and John McLean one vote each, and Abraham Lincoln and William H. Seward two votes each.—F. I. Herriott's *Iowa and the First Nomination of Abraham Lincoln* in the *Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. VIII, p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, May 25, 1860.



sized their importance. Cheering news came in from eastern journals, in the prediction that former Democrats were already "joining hands with the Republicans in this campaign".<sup>13</sup>

Twenty years before, when William Henry Harrison from what was then considered the western wilds of Ohio had entered the presidential arena, the log cabin appeared as the insignia of the campaign. In 1860 the wigwam took its place. The Lincoln and Hamlin Republican Club therefore called its headquarters, on the floor above the *Gazette* office, the Wigwam. By handbills and by word of mouth the whole countryside from Waterloo to Waverly, and from New Hartford to Hudson, soon learned that the Cedar Falls Republican Wigwam would open its doors at seven every Saturday night, and that the singing of campaign songs would precede an hour of discussion on political topics. When the Lincoln and Hamlin Club could secure "stumpers", citizens and visitors congregated at the schoolhouse<sup>14</sup> because of its larger seating capacity.

From May until the November election, Saturday night found this local Wigwam or the schoolhouse crowded with Democrats who came to scoff and with loyal Republicans — merchants, mechanics, and farmers — who came to be informed or to have their convictions deepened, or to join in the singing of patriotic and campaign airs. To strengthen the campaign spirit, George C. Dean was appointed a committee of one to collect literature appropriate for distribution, and was duly authorized to take subscriptions for a "pictorial paper", printed in Cincinnati and called *The Railsplitter*. By the middle of July he had secured eighty subscribers.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "Cheering News" in the *Cedar Falls Gazette*, June 1, 1860.

<sup>14</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, June 22, 1860.

<sup>15</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, July 20, 1860.



Each Friday afternoon the *Gazette* informed all patrons concerning the program planned by the Lincoln and Hamlin Club for the following evening, and it often listed "stumpers" for several Saturdays ahead. Five young Republicans — G. Van Saun, Chester S. Sawyer, M. L. Tracy, Frank Cooper, and H. C. Hunt organized a Lincoln and Hamlin Glee Club. Their singing of campaign airs, floating out from the open windows of the Wigwam or the schoolhouse, regularly delayed the Saturday night barter of butter and eggs for calico and candle moulds until the music and the "stumping" were over.

When the speeches and the trading had at last been completed, and the last weary clerk had filled the last can with "fluid oil" (kerosene), the farmers slapped the reins over the backs of their plow horses and drove to their log homes on the prairie with the tune of "Lincoln and Victory" reverberating through their ears while they hummed the chorus which the Glee Club had chanted:

Three cheers for Hamlin!

For LINCOLN, three times three.

To the women, who had remained at home to set the yeast or to complete "the stint" of spinning, the men reported that "old Abe was taking like wildfire" and that "the Northwest was ablaze for their favorite son".

The Lincoln and Hamlin Glee Club acquired a repertoire of campaign songs. The Cedar Falls Brass Band ordered new instruments and under the impetus of the approaching campaign succeeded in raising three hundred dollars for new snare drums and fifes and, at last, fulfilled its ambition and that of the village by purchasing a brilliantly painted bandwagon to which four horses could be hitched, and also full regalia for the horses and players.<sup>16</sup> By stage and train C. S. Sawyer journeyed to Chicago and returned with

<sup>16</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, June 29, 1860.



a portmanteau of campaign songs. One favorite, entitled "A Song For Prairie Land", set to the music of the "Marseillaise", had been written by Jesse Clement, editor of the *Dubuque Times*. One of its easily memorized stanzas closed with the words:

Free winds the prairies kiss  
 Free men here! Happy toil!  
 Forever shall our watchword be  
 Forever free this soil.

The Glee Club also sang with gusto "The Republican Rally Song". Its first stanza sounded a clarion call:

Arouse! Arouse! Republicans,  
 Awake! to Duty's call! . . .  
 Strive for your principles  
 Battle for the right.

Its variant choruses ran:

Then Huzzah! for Freedom!  
 Huzzah! for Liberty!  
 Three cheers for Hamlin!  
 For Lincoln three times three!

Then onward to the struggle  
 And let our watchwords be  
*God and our Country*  
*Lincoln and Victory!*<sup>17</sup>

On succeeding Saturday nights the Lincoln and Hamlin Glee Club responded to encores with a "Lincoln Song", one stanza of which ran as follows:

Abe Lincoln is our leader,  
 Of whom we are all proud;  
 The tallest of our candidates,  
 In the Presidential crowd.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, July 27, 1860.

<sup>18</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, July 13, 1860.



The executive committee of the Lincoln and Hamlin Club fully recognized the psychological value of the weekly appearance of the band, with the prairie sunset gleaming on the new regalia and glistening wagon as it repeatedly toured Main Street from the Millrace Bridge to the schoolhouse at Fifth and Main Streets. The leaders were also aware of the effect of the spirited singing and cheering once the crowds were assembled.

For the first half of the summer in 1860 the Lincoln and Hamlin Club depended largely upon the *Gazette* and upon its local leaders for guidance. At the Saturday meetings such men as the farmer-legislator, Zimri Streeter, and the local State Senator, A. H. Brown, spoke extemporaneously upon such issues as "States Rights" and economy. Peter Melendy reported on the convention in the Chicago Wigwam. Later the *Gazette* advertised a series "stumpers". Sometimes local professional men or politicians from Waterloo, Waverly, and Independence spoke, after which John L. Wilcox, Solomon Lombard, H. A. and George D. Perkins, Peter Melendy, and Colonel W. H. Sessions directed the discussions.

As the local community awakened to the issues at stake, the executive committee succeeded in bringing to the city outstanding speakers from nearby towns and several of the candidates for State offices. On July 14th, M. W. Newton of Waterloo and E. P. Conkling of Vinton addressed the Lincoln and Hamlin Club; on July 21st, Warner H. Curtiss of Waterloo was the orator; August 25th, Elijah Sells and Jonathan W. Cattell, candidates respectively for the offices of Secretary of State and Auditor, spoke.

The *Gazette* kept the national campaign before its patrons. It reported that the Baltimore Convention (Democratic) had given marked evidences of opposing factions within itself. The Perkins brothers openly welcomed this



rift and expressed the hope that men who studied the Chicago platform would see that the Republican Party in 1860 stood for principles to which northern Democrats could not be opposed.

As co-editor of the *Baraboo Republic*, H. A. Perkins had followed the Lincoln-Douglas debates in July and August of 1858, with interest. In the election of a United States Senator from Illinois, he had seen Stephen A. Douglas defeat Abraham Lincoln by a 54-46 vote in the Illinois legislature. Abolitionist and anti-secessionist, H. A. Perkins had seen little in Douglas to merit elevation to the Senate and less to qualify him for the office of President of the United States. He feared Douglas's hold on the slave States, and thoroughly disapproved of his advocacy of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill of 1856 and the doctrine of squatter-sovereignty. By mid-July, the Perkins brothers became more and more confident that Stephen A. Douglas would be defeated at the polls in November. They prophesied that Lincoln would carry New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Oregon, Indiana, and Illinois.

In their editorials they rejoiced in this prospect, writing, "Now, does *STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS* deserve any other fate at the hands of the American people? Was it not *STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS* that precipitated on this country that unnecessary and uncalled for agitation of the slavery question, by the passage of the infamous Nebraska bill, which resulted in destroying the harmony and good feeling existing between the North and the South, and involving the country in fruitless and angry discussions, which, *per se*, made the plains of Kansas, the scene of a civil war, and which resulted in depriving her citizens, even to this day, of the rights and privileges justly theirs. In heart and principle, *MR. DOUGLAS* is as thoroughly pro-slavery as the most rabid southern fire-eater. His boasted



principle of Squatter Sovereignty, however well it may sound to the popular ear, in its practical workings, is the greatest misnomer in existence, and what more could be expected from it when the author publicly declares, 'I care not whether slavery be voted up or down', and that his doctrine of Squatter Sovereignty had given to slavery an area of territory five and a half times larger than the state of New York. . . . Fickle, headstrong, and treacherous, the south will not trust him, or the north support him and the 6th of November will dawn upon him the worst whipped man that ever ran for the *Presidency*.'<sup>19</sup>

In spite of these activities and the confidence that Cedar Falls was dominantly Republican, energetic citizens began to feel that the Lincoln and Hamlin Club was not doing enough to convince doubtful voters in the town and surrounding country of the evils of the Democratic principles. Many of the voters had participated in torch and nightshirt rallies in New York, in New England, and in Ohio. On Saturday evening, July 21st, Peter Melendy took the floor and laid before the Club proposals for a grand political rally. By "grand", he indicated that he did not advocate a local or county affair, but one to include all of the Cedar Valley from Vinton, fifty miles south, to Charles City, fifty miles to the north. Amazement fell upon the group, for the difficulty of transportation over a hundred miles of prairie with few roads was obvious. How could the counties from Benton to Floyd contribute to the occasion when only one railroad, the Dubuque and Sioux City, had little more than crossed the eastern border of Black Hawk County?

Merchants, however, quickly rallied to the proposal; land agents and professional men also saw an opportunity to advertise their city. Republican boosters suavely ironed out all difficulties, and the editors of the *Gazette* whole-

<sup>19</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, July 13, 1860.



heartedly supported the project. Before adjournment, President W. H. Sessions appointed a general committee of five to report on July 28th. He selected Peter Melendy as chairman, with Zimri Streeter, D. C. Overman, M. W. Chapman, and E. D. Adams as supporters. The date set for this "Grand Republican Rally" was September 6, 1860, two months to the day, before the November election. True to its promise to support the rally, the *Gazette* reported: "The Lincoln and Hamlin Club will invite all the Clubs of our Valley, to come with Banners, Mottos [sic] Flags, Streamers, Music, Men, women, children, and Big Teams, and to bring all Creation with them."<sup>20</sup>

The evening of July 28th found the local Republican Wigwam filled to capacity. In the fortnight, the committee had held several adjourned meetings. The date, September 6, was confirmed, a grand parade was mapped out, its line of march charted with places assigned to every Republican Club and every brass band in the upper Cedar Valley. A "stumpers" program was arranged for the afternoon and evening. Fireworks were considered a necessity. In order that this rally day should be made memorable, the chairman, under advice from the general committee on arrangements, appointed eleven subsidiary committees. H. A. Perkins became publicity manager.

Zimri Streeter, who had served in the Iowa legislature, dispatched invitations to Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood, C. C. Nourse, and Lyman Trumbell, and announced the following invited speakers for the Grand Rally Day: Senator James W. Grimes, William Vandever, Tom Drummond, Charles Pomeroy, Austin Adams, and F. W. Palmer.<sup>21</sup>

The *Gazette* for August 31st and handbills set up by H. A. Perkins advertised the program for the Grand Rally

<sup>20</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, July 20, 1860.

<sup>21</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, July 27 and August 3, 1860.



as one which "would not be equalled in the State" before election. All residents on the line of march were requested to decorate their porches, picket and iron fences, and lawns with flags, streamers, and emblems. Many citizens ornamented their lawns with such appropriate mottoes as:

GOD MADE THE TERRITORIES FREE AND PRONOUNCED THEM  
GOOD

WITH LINCOLN THERE IS HOPE

WE PREFER HONEST ABE TO DODGER DUG

The chartered line of march began at Seventh and Main streets, ran north to First, west four blocks to Iowa, north to Sixth, east three blocks to Washington, south to Tenth, east one block to Main, south to Second, and then west two blocks to the Public Square where the first oration of the day was delivered. The advertised parade consisted of the marshal, the Cedar Falls Band, the president and vice presidents of the day, the speakers and invited guests, the committees on arrangements, delegates from the counties of the Cedar Valley, delegates from townships, and the Cedar Falls Lincoln and Hamlin Club.<sup>22</sup> By early September through sheer dint of faith in itself, Cedar Falls felt itself ready to welcome five thousand visitors and, according to the *Gazette*, five thousand men, women, and children witnessed or participated in the Grand Rally.

The weather, always unpredictable in an Iowa September, could not have been more favorable. On the fairgrounds, a camping place had been "readied up" for families whose slow plow horses or oxen could not make the round trip to the Rally in less than two, three, or four days. The women of the town worked for days with red, white, and blue muslin. They transformed farm wagons into patriotic floats and made costumes and lettered flags and streamers. Others prepared barbecued meat over out-of-

<sup>22</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, August 31, 1860.



door fires. The hotels called in additional help. The children counted the days.

Young George D. Perkins, a born reporter, caught the color, the humor, the excitement, and the implications of the issues of the day. Soon after F. W. Palmer, editor of the *Dubuque Times* and final speaker of the Grand Rally Day, "had paid a handsome tribute to the worth and character of Honest Abe", George D. Perkins began to write his report for the next Friday's *Gazette*.

His account described the rally in detail. "At an early hour our streets began to fill up with arrivals from the surrounding country, and look which way you would, you could see the bone and sinew of the country rolling in, in big and little teams, on horseback and on foot; in fact the practice seemed to be, 'roll in, tumble in, any way to get in, only make certain of being on hand in time.'"

Very early that morning the two local cannon, the Devil and the Baby Waker, stationed at the head of Main Street, sounded the first salute of the day, as they roared a welcome to the Republican Club of St. Charles (now Charles City) in Floyd County when two heavy Conestoga wagons, each drawn by four horses, clattered over the new bridge on the Cedar River and over the Millrace Bridge. With its "band playing a lively air", the delegation halted at Main and First streets. The members of the St. Charles Republican Club had driven fifty miles to participate in the Grand Rally. Taking two days for the trip, they had camped overnight in the river timber north of Janesville. On this September morning, the club lost no time in displaying its "fine banners", with such inscriptions as A FREE PRESS AND FREE HOMES FOR FREEMEN, WE MAUL BLACK DEMOCRACY, and LINCOLN AND HAMLIN, THE PEOPLES' CHOICE.

Almost immediately the Devil and the Baby Waker boomed a second welcome to other parties arriving from



the north, this time to the Republicans of Waverly and of Bremer County, "whose twenty wagons, everyone filled to overflowing" came rumbling over the bridges. The wagon in the lead was pulled by six horses. One of the floats carried a large easel, displaying on one side a life-size oil painting of Abraham Lincoln, and on the other in large lettering the words, WE CARE WHETHER SLAVERY IS VOTED UP OR DOWN. From another wagon floated a huge American flag, inscribed with the names of the presidential candidates.

A third time the cannon boomed when the local sentries caught glimpses of the Butler County Republican Clubs of New Hartford and Willoughby making their way from the west down the winding and heavily wooded roadway, now straightened into First Street. Their largest wagon, drawn by six horses, rumbled ahead with the fresh paint on its boxed sides gleaming, with the names of the thirty-three States in the Union in 1860. A lengthy float, built to resemble a Mississippi River barge, also drawn by six horses, followed. Later in the parade, it reappeared, loaded crosswise with hickory logs to which the tallest railsplitters available noisily applied shining axes.

Down the same road a half hour later, the Butler Center Club appeared, proudly displaying an American flag eighteen feet long. Farm boys in one of the wagons displayed numerous banners painted with such mottoes as: WE ARE FOR LANDS FOR THE LANDLESS NOT NIGGERS FOR THE NIGGERLESS, and DOUGLAS DON'T CARE WHETHER SLAVERY IS VOTED UP OR DOWN. WE DO. From the south end of Main Street, the Waterloo delegation, "a hundred strong", and one from Vinton with its brass band and bandwagon moved up Main Street to meet the arrivals from the west and north.

At ten A. M. Chief Marshal J. M. Overman and his assistants formed into a moving line, one mile long, the first of



many parades which the little city of Cedar Falls was to witness. The Cedar Falls Brass Band led the vanguard and the Cedar Falls Lincoln and Hamlin Club brought up the rear. Immediately following the Cedar Falls Brass Band, came the Liberty Car, a huge hay wagon with its frame built out to form a widely extended platform, with a small overhead canopy. The women had decorated this car with red, white, and blue bunting. Thirty-three little girls, dressed in white, surrounded a Goddess of Liberty who sat precariously on the highest level. Each child waved a white streamer bearing the name of a State. Above their heads attached to the canopy was the inscription, "Our fathers are for Lincoln", but no observer on that village street could then foresee that many years would elapse before a second Liberty Car could again portray a united nation including these thirty-three States. Behind the Liberty Car came one hundred older belles, their flower-printed, hooped skirts, filling to overflowing an immense flatboat propelled by three yoke of plodding oxen. These prairie maids waved streamers bearing the slogans OLD ABE IS GOING TO BE PRESIDENT and DOUGLAS IS GOING HOME TO SEE HIS MOTHER.

Except for the Democrats, who took their politics very seriously, onlookers laughed uproariously at the floats which burlesqued Douglas. The first represented Douglas as "a grotesque-looking person, made so by a false face, wig, and garments of a rather unusual cut". From a high seat, clumsily elevated above two high wheels of a huge "log-cart", Douglas was driving a span of mules allegedly — the banner declared — in search of his mother. The second represented a canoe dangerously poised on the frame of a "democrat" wagon. It contained "two hideous looking creatures" employed in piloting the craft. The float bore the label, "Douglas Squatters — Engaged for Salt River".



With the bands from Vinton, Waterloo, Charles City, and Cedar Falls scattered at intervals throughout the mile-long parade, to the rhythm of patriotic and campaign airs, Marshal Overman led the rally day parade to the public square and the speakers to the railsplitter's grandstand — truly so, for the platform, balustrade, and chairs had been decorated with twisted wythes.

In witty fashion, Zimri Streeter ("Old Black Hawk" to Iowa legislators), the president of the day, introduced the noonday speaker, Hon. Tom Drummond of Vinton. For one hour and fifteen minutes he proved himself an eloquent "stumper", by pouring "hot shot in a telling manner into the Democracy". This lengthy rhetorical and "spread-eagle" address cut the midday intermission to a scant hour. Children were sent scurrying to wagons on the side streets for picnic baskets; thirst, quenched by pink lemonade, was very soon aggravated by hot peanuts and popped corn. At two, the cannon, fifes, and drums of the Vinton Brass Band again summoned "the great concourse to the railsplitter's platform". Here the crowd heard Judge C. A. Newcomb of West Union and Hon. S. P. Adams of Dubuque, and Hon. J. A. Kasson, as with resonant voices and grandiloquent gestures, they dealt with the political situation.

After the "stumping", Marshal Overman led the assembly in loud cheering for Lincoln and Hamlin, and Chester S. Sawyer stood behind the split-log balustrade to direct the singing of campaign airs played by the visiting bands. After an elaborate display of fireworks at dusk, the crowd assembled in Overman Hall where the president of the day introduced W. B. Fairfield of Floyd County. The band from Charles City played martial music after which, F. W. Palmer of the *Dubuque Times*, speaking at length, reviewed the history of the effort to exclude slavery from the



Union from 1784 to 1854. He endeavored to show that although the administration of James Buchanan had reversed that historic policy, reliance could now be definitely placed on Lincoln and Hamlin. He concluded by paying a "handsome tribute" to Abraham Lincoln.

The Great Republican Rally Day at last came to an end. George D. Perkins reported that "Old Black Hawk" led the crowded assembly in giving "Three Cheers with a hearty will for Lincoln and Hamlin, and that amid the soul-inspiring music of the fife and drum, the convention adjourned." A grand ball completed the affair. To the townspeople this rally had the subtle, yet then scarcely realized, effect of demonstrating the possibility of coöperative community effort.<sup>23</sup>

H. A. and George D. Perkins did not permit the Lincoln and Hamlin Club to grow apathetic; they constantly urged the members to renew their efforts and give the Republicans of the State a larger majority than they had hitherto enjoyed. For the September 22nd meeting the Club announced Charles Pomeroy and Judge W. B. Fairfield as speakers; for October 15th, William Vandever and Ben M. Samuels; and for October 20th, Charles C. Nourse.<sup>24</sup> On October 29th the last pre-election speech was given by the local State Representative, A. H. Brown.

The *Gazette*, hoping for a landslide Republican vote, continued to urge that Black Hawk County exceed its 1856 majority of three hundred votes. In the two months between September 6th and November 6th, George D. Perkins occasionally injected grim humor in his attacks upon the Democratic Party. Borrowing an exchange squib from the *Baraboo Republic* he ironically invited prospective voters to witness the demise and burial of the Democratic Party:

<sup>23</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, September 7, 1860.

<sup>24</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, September 14, 28, October 5, 12, 1860.



## DIED

In the United States, pretty much all over on the second Tuesday of October, the 9th inst. D. Moeracy, Esq. aged 62 years.

The funeral will take place at sundown, Nov. 6th at the polls; the inspectors of the election officiating. The public are respectfully invited to attend.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the autumn of 1860, the *Gazette* continued to seize every opportunity to disparage Stephen A. Douglas. George D. Perkins wrote of the recently published *Record of Stephen A. Douglas on the Slavery Question*: "It places Stephen A. Douglas, as portrayed by himself, in the character of an apostate from the principle of true Democracy and as an advocate of John C. Calhoun". With equal scorn the young editors expressed disdain over an invitation to attend a Douglas rally in Dubuque, writing "We are a volunteer in the Republican Army, fighting with what little influence and ability we may possess for the Faith of our Fathers", a faith, he made clear, which repudiated both slavery and squatter sovereignty.

"Are We Ready" headed the *Gazette's* editorial column for October 5, 1860. Although a Republican victory seemed assured in Black Hawk County, the Perkins brothers refused to rest or to permit the members of the Lincoln and Hamlin Club to cease from active promulgation of the Republican cause in their community. To all who favored that party the editors issued definite orders. The workers were urged to check every available Republican vote in the vicinity, to participate in and encourage township meetings during the ensuing four weeks, to arouse the listless and convince the doubtful, to plan to bring voters to the polls, and to guard the ballot boxes.<sup>26</sup>

Not content with these admonitions the Perkins brothers,

<sup>25</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, October 26, 1860.

<sup>26</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, October 5, 1860.



just a week later, urged all patrons and readers to subscribe to the Republican ticket, for, they asserted, a Republican victory was bound to bring the following results: an administration pledged to economy, revised homestead laws, free territory for free men, imposition of a quietus on the African slave trade, the admission of Kansas as a free State under her own constitution, the encouragement of industry, and the advancement of free labor.<sup>27</sup>

As election day approached, tension gripped the citizens of Cedar Falls. Though in the minority, the Democrats demonstrated their party spirit by erecting a flag pole on Main Street which rampant Republicans attempted to destroy. With the sense of fair play which Editor George D. Perkins was to display for more than fifty years, he wrote: "The Democracy have a perfect right to a pole and a flag and should be allowed to possess them free from molestation". Young Perkins, however, closed his editorial with a touch of satire, expressing the hope that if the pole were allowed to remain in place until November 6th that "the Democracy" might allow the Republicans the use of it when the hour came for celebrating the election of Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin.<sup>28</sup>

With incisive reiterations the Perkins brothers kept anti-slavery propaganda before their readers. Heading an editorial "Freedom versus Slavery", they set out to show that Democrats were "pledged to the support of the maintenance of slavery in the territories." On the other hand they pointed out, "The opposite is represented by the Republican Party which is firmly opposed to the extension of slavery. . . . Every vote cast for Abraham Lincoln virtually says, 'No more Slave territory!' Every vote cast for Douglas . . . [says] 'No more Free Territory!'

<sup>27</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, October 12, 1860.

<sup>28</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, October 12, 1860.



Choose ye between them."<sup>29</sup> In the issue of the *Gazette*, just preceding the election the Perkins brothers re-affirmed their conviction that Abraham Lincoln would be the people's choice, for cheering reports came through eastern papers. Lest voters become too optimistic and overconfident the *Gazette*, however, prodded the unwary by warning voters that they "must still keep constantly in mind that work, vigorous work, a long pull, and a pull together were the only means by which success could be rendered certain." On the eve of the election young Perkins urged his Republican patrons to present themselves at the polls and to cast their votes "for Freedom".<sup>30</sup>

The national and local results of the election on November 6th delighted George D. and H. A. Perkins. The official vote in Black Hawk County stood 1122 for the Republicans and 557 for the Democrats, almost a two to one victory.<sup>31</sup> Abraham Lincoln had already won the heartfelt devotion of the young editors. The memory of Abraham Lincoln became enshrined as a directing force in their lives as long as they lived. Their faith in Lincoln as a steadying force lifted their spirits amid the dark premonitions developing in the North that secession might become a reality. Two weeks after the election George D. Perkins wrote: "Lincoln is eminently conservative and disposed to deal fairly and impartially with all sections of our common country."<sup>32</sup>

The Perkins brothers were opposed to any form of appeasement with the South. "If the North yield now to appease the voracious maw of slavery", they wrote, "when will these demands cease? If we yield now, the sooner will

<sup>29</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, October 19, 1860.

<sup>30</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, November 2, 1860.

<sup>31</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, November 16, 1860.

<sup>32</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, November 23, 1860.



we again be called upon to do the same thing, and each time the concession demanded will be more ignoble and servile for us."<sup>33</sup> In January of 1861 the *Gazette*, still apprehensive, noted with alarm that the "South Carolina Commissioners have left Washington in a huff", but it expressed approval when President Buchanan's cabinet refused to accede to the demands of the Secessionists that Major Robert Anderson's command be removed from Fort Sumter.<sup>34</sup> Approval changed to dismay, however, when the *Gazette* reported in mid-January that the *Star of the West* had been fired upon by rebels while it was endeavoring to supply Fort Sumter with reinforcements.<sup>35</sup> A week later the paper praised Secretary Seward's speech before the Senate of the United States for its "full and thrilling appeals, unanswerable arguments upon the blessings of the Union and the evils of disunion. . . . He [Seward] has nothing to say to the people except that the Union is inestimable and its dissolution our universal ruin."<sup>36</sup> As excitement flared in both the North and the South, the *Gazette* declared that it spoke with "the voice of the great northwest" in demanding "No more Compromising! No further concessions! Now let the government be tested."<sup>37</sup>

That very week young George D. Perkins, still one month short of his twenty-first birthday, joined the local militia company organized in Cedar Falls by J. J. Laman. With this group, which called itself the Pioneer Greys, he learned a few fundamentals of military maneuvers. The next year he answered the summons to active combat duty.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, December 14, 1860.

<sup>34</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, January 11, 1861.

<sup>35</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, January 11, 1861.

<sup>36</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, January 18, 1861.

<sup>37</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, January 25, 1861.

<sup>38</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, January 25, 1861. George D. Perkins enlisted on August 12, 1862, in Company B, Thirty-first Iowa Infantry.



In late February the *Gazette* chronicled the thirteen-day trip of the President-elect as Lincoln journeyed from Springfield to Washington. The fear, felt in the east, that hostile forces might try to prevent Lincoln's inauguration by violence, found an echo in the western newspapers. The *Gazette* printed a rumor that an attempt at assassination had already occurred at Baltimore.<sup>39</sup>

On March 4, 1861, in Washington, Abraham Lincoln took his oath of office. Three days later George D. and H. A. Perkins summarized their fears and their hopes for the coming four years in an editorial, "Lincoln has Spoken". It began with congratulations to the nation on the election of Abraham Lincoln, summarized the *Gazette's* views, expressed faith in the new administration, and ended with a paean of praise for the motives of Abraham Lincoln:<sup>40</sup>

#### LINCOLN HAS SPOKEN

If the lovers of the American Union — the lovers of Civil and Religious Liberty — the Lovers of Freedom — the lovers of Country — those who have its best interests uppermost in their hearts, ever had the occasion for rejoicing, and rendering thanks to the Almighty Ruler of the Universe, it is for the accession of ABRAHAM LINCOLN to the Presidency of the United States! The highest trusts within the gift of this people, so long occupied by imbecile [sic], traitorous, and dishonest men, are now filled by men of principle, strength, honesty, firmness — lovers of their country, and of the Faith of their Fathers. "An honest man is the noblest work of God.", and though among many politicians God's noblest work may be hard to find, who will doubt that in Abraham Lincoln we have that specimen.

The address of MR. LINCOLN comes fully up to our anticipations. We believe him to be the man for the exigencies of the times, and that whoever else may falter in the discharge of duty ABRAHAM LINCOLN will never swerve. His duty is the enforcement of the Constitution and the Laws, as he receives them from the

<sup>39</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, March 1, 1861.

<sup>40</sup> *Cedar Falls Gazette*, March 8, 1861.



hands of the people. If the people desire to amend the Constitution or modify those laws, his duty is still the same. He does not consider that the Union is dissolved, and he will enforce the laws and collect the revenues of the Southern States, the same as if an ordinance of secession had never been passed, national defenses captured or government property plundered.

Now then we have a Government! All hail ABRAHAM LINCOLN! May this glorious Union, its Institutions of Liberty, Freedom, Justice, Wisdom, and equal rights, abundantly prosper under the fostering care of a Republican Administration.

LUELLA M. WRIGHT

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