Gilbert N. Haugen, Apprentice Congressman

by
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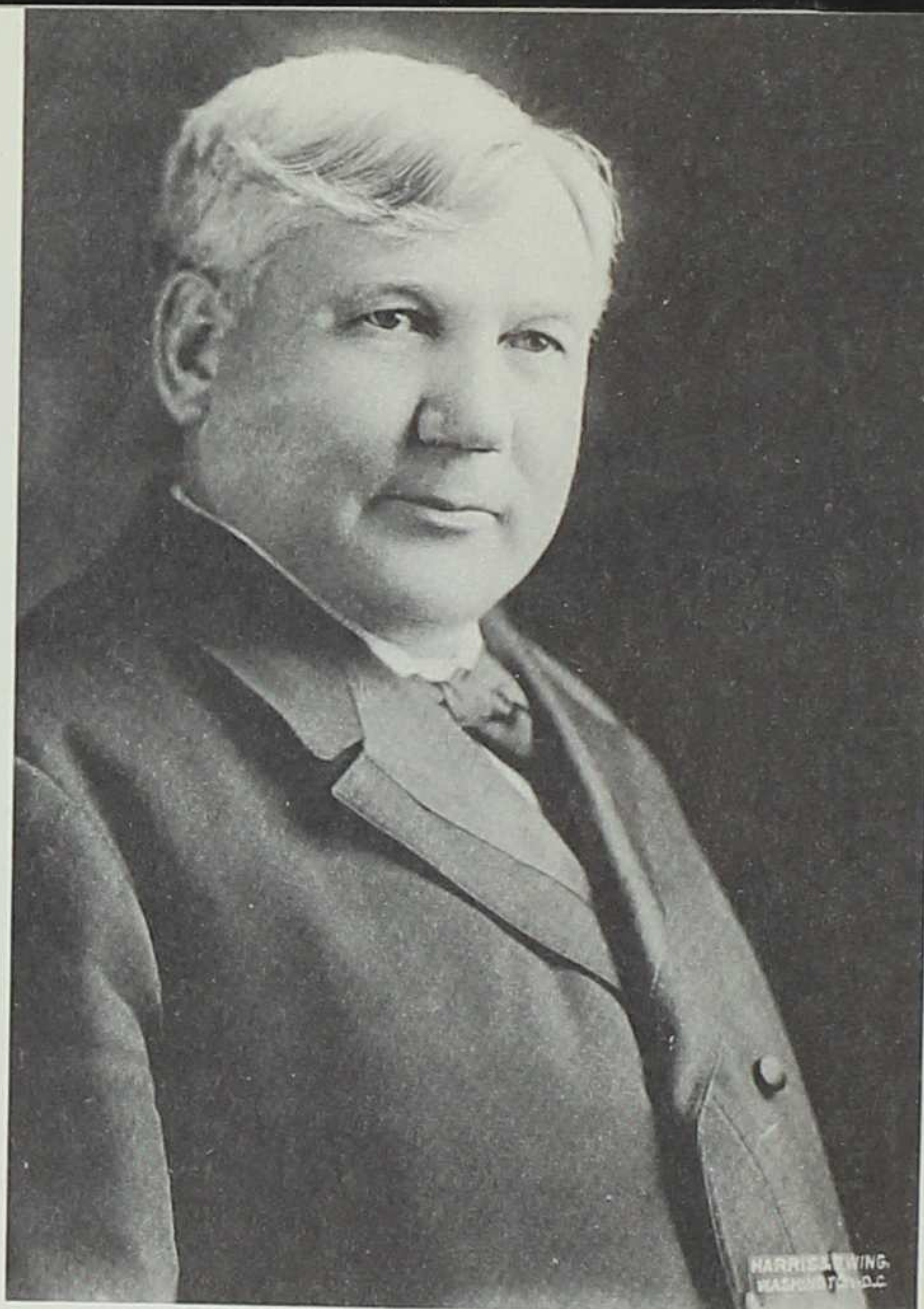
Gilbert N. Haugen

Gilbert N. Haugen is probably best known for the agricultural legislation he co-sponsored with Senator Charles L. McNary of Oregon in the late 1920s. Twice passed by Congress, and twice vetoed, the bill arranged to dispose of agricultural surplus by a process of dumping it on foreign markets and making up the loss to farmers with an equalization fee to producers. McNary-Haugenism, an idea too advanced for its time, became a kind of faith in agricultural circles and lent much energy to the farm legislation of the New Deal. But if the New Deal brought to fruition Haugen's work for equity, it also ended his half-century career as a Republican officeholder when he was defeated in the Roosevelt-Democratic landslide of 1932.

The son of Norwegian emigrants, Haugen built a loyal constituency of rural north-central Iowans and retained for a generation their confidence and their votes. These voters lived in the old Fourth District, which included Worth, Mitchell, Winneshiek, Allamakee, Cerro Gordo, Floyd, Chickasaw, Fayette, and Clayton counties, before Buchanan and Delaware were added in 1931. They returned to office again and again a politician known for his industry, integrity, party loyalty, regularity on most issues, and an ability to make and keep friends inside and outside the party. He began his 34 years of continuous service in the United States House of Representatives on March 4, 1899. What follows is an account of his early days in office, a very auspicious time for young Republicans, given the powerful "Iowa Delegation" in both houses and the new speaker, David B. Henderson of Iowa. The freshman year for any Congressman, past or present, is important not only for the high-ranking friends and opportune connections he makes, but also for the way he comes to terms with the day-to-day concerns of those who elected him. Accordingly, the following article, while it sets Haugen in the context of the Congress, chronicles the humbler, but often more colorful activity of handling the folks back home.

The article is a selection from a book-length manuscript biography of Gilbert N. Haugen by Peter T. Harstad and Bonnie Michael. Since this area of the biography fell primarily to Bonnie Michael, her name appears as author. –Ed.

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The Capital

J. H. Wheeler, Iowa newspaperman and political advisor, spurred on Haugen in his political career by explaining the advantages of holding congressional office. "It is better than being a governor for if you are a good man, it lasts a lifetime," he noted prophetically. "It is highly honorable and influential. It opens all the honors and high places. The salary is $5,000 per annum or

$10,000 per term, besides mileage and other advantages. But the privilege and right to live in Washington and be an American lawmaker is greater than to be a European lord and is absolutely above money value." In his office in the Northwood Bank, Haugen surveyed the stacks of mail that were the first fruits of his victory. Along with congratulatory messages came a flood of requests for his attention and services, including urgent letters about post office matters. Most of the latter he referred to Congressman Thomas Updegraff, the incumbent from Haugen's district; he refused to take sides in such matters until he began his term and looked into things himself.

As the mail piled up, Haugen realized that an early item of business must be the hiring of a secretary. Representatives received $125 a month for clerk hire. Since freshman congressmen usually held no committee chairmanships (which qualified them for additional staff), Haugen could hire only one person at government expense. Numerous applications arrived for this position. December 16, 1898 Haugen received a letter from Merton E. Comstock, Thomas Updegraff's secretary. "I do not want, nor do I intend, to bore you in the matter of my appointment as your private sec'ry," wrote Comstock, "but I do not want my claims to suffer for want of push on my part . . . Of the desirability of having somebody of experience here, there can be no question." Comstock tactfully avoided reference to Haugen's own inexperience, choosing instead to offer the new congressman some helpful advice "in regard to combinations in the House, which controls the House patronage." Haugen chose Comstock, rejecting other applicants for the post, including J.H. Wheeler. "Mert" proved himself an invaluable aide. Not only did he grasp the workings of Washington, but he was intimately involved in Fourth District politics. Born and reared in Fayette County where his father and brothers were officeholders and active Republican workers, he was a better politician than typist. His Iowa background gave him other valuable skills: during congressional recess, he sometimes put up hay or supervised sheep shearing on one of Haugen's numerous farms.

Haugen made another valuable ally in the months following his election. The defeated Congressman Thomas Updegraff, ever after a faithful supporter and friend, urged Haugen to get in touch with James A. Smith of Osage. "I found him at all times the wisest, best and most loyal friend I ever had, " Updegraff wrote. "He makes no trouble but goes and does things and dont cackle either before or after laying an egg."

Haugen found Smith to be as skilled a political analyst as Updegraff had promised. Smith, a prosperous Mitchell County businessman, was grateful for Haugen's interest. He aspired to the State senatorial seat shared by Mitchell, Worth, and Winnebago counties. Haugen, the acknowleged leader of the Worth County delegation, willingly assisted in Smith's nomination and the defeat of the Forest City ring. For many years Smith served as Haugen's most astute political advisor.

Another letter to the new Congressman introduced a West Union native, Carrie Harrison. Miss Harrison, a botanical clerk in the Bureau of Plant Industry of the Department of Agriculture, advised Haugen to seek a place on the Agriculture Committee, where "there are a half dozen questions, the settling of any one would make a man famous. . . ." An indefatigable correspondent, she kept in communication with most of the Iowans in Congress, never

hesitating to offer unsolicited political advice or to lobby for favorite causes. Garrulous and often tiresome, Miss Harrison was nonetheless an important political contact. She introduced Haugen to many Iowans in Washington, including Milton Updegraff, an astronomer, and Seaman Knapp, the "father of agricultural extension work." She knew how to get sample ornamental shrubs to send to Haugen's constituents, or to arrange for botanical collections to go to colleges in his district. In exchange, she asked his help in her frequent altercations with her superiors. A widower with two attractive children, Haugen quickly became Miss Harrison's favorite politician. She cooked Sunday dinners for him whenever she could pry him away from the office, entertained his children, and even hinted broadly that girls the age of Norma Haugen needed mothers. Her loyalty and affection for the Congressman never flagged.

Haugen had been preparing for Washington and congressional service for a long time. During his years in the Iowa General Assembly he kept scrapbooks on national issues and followed the debates closely, particularly on the currency question. He continued his self-education, filling memobooks with notes on everything from marketing statistics to words he wished to add to his vocabulary.

He also made preparations of a more practical kind. Mindful of style and status, Haugen ordered from Brown Brothers, Merchant Tailers, Minneapolis a new dress suit, a business suit, a vest, and an overcoat for a total of $125 — a high price, but worth it for clothes from the same tailors who made suits for Knute Nelson of Minnesota, the best-known Norwegian-American of the time. Haugen had good reason for wishing to make a good impression. The congressional delegation he was joining was one of the most powerful and influential in the nation. Every one of the returning Iowa senators and representatives held at least one committee chairmanship; several of them moved among the highest ranks of the nation's policymakers.

The undisputed leader of the Iowa delegation was Senator William Boyd Allison of Dubuque. Since his election to the House of Representatives in 1862 and his switch to the Senate in 1872, Allison had acquired remarkable legislative and political power. He chaired the Republican caucus, the Steering Committee, and was a member of the influential Committee on Committees. As chairman of the Committee on Appropriations he controlled the government pursestrings, but his real power lay in an unofficial role. Allison and three other members of the Senate Finance Committee — Nelson Aldrich of Rhode Island, Orville Platt of Connecticut, and John C. Spooner of Wisconsin — held such extraordinary influence on all matters political and financial that they were referred to simply as "The Four."

Iowa's junior Senator John H. Gear was one of the first Iowans to join the Republican party. Elected mayor of Burlington as a Republican in 1863, he served as Governor of Iowa, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury under President Harrison, and in the House of Representatives before his election to the Senate in 1895, where he chaired the Committee on Pacific Railroads.

The House delegation in 1899 included six veteran congressmen and five newcomers. All were Republicans, elected to a House so solidly Republican that some of the new men had to be seated on the Democratic side of the aisle.

Senior in service among Iowa Republicans was William P. Hepburn of Clarinda, first elected to the House in 1881. In 1899

he chaired the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. John A.T. Hull of Des Moines was chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs and John F. Lacey of Oskaloosa was chairman of the Committee on Public Lands. Robert G. Cousins of Tipton, chairman of the Committee on Expenditures in the Treasury Department, was less noted for his legislative achievements than for his polished oratory. Many Iowans considered the youngest of the returning members, Jonathan P. Dolliver, to be the most promising. Dolliver of Fort Dodge, barely 40 in 1899, was beginning his fifth term in the House. Quick-minded and hard-working, Dolliver took his legislative work seriously, but his reputation was largely built upon his consummate skill as an orator. When the House was not in session he traveled the Chautauqua Circuit. David B. Henderson of Dubuque, whose initial service began the term after Hepburn's, held more power than any Iowan in the House as chairman of the Judiciary Committee and member of the powerful Rules Committee.

In April 1899, Representative Henderson wrote to Haugen about a matter of mutual interest. It appeared that Thomas Reed, the Speaker of the House, would retire from Congress, and Henderson wanted to run for the speakership. Haugen wired back his enthusiastic support.

The Iowa delegation was to meet in Des Moines May 17, 1899, ostensibly to attend the cornerstone-laying for the Historical Building, but actually to plan strategy for Henderson's bid. Other meetings were planned, but were cancelled when Henderson amassed sufficient support. The official vote and the ceremony installing the new speaker were scheduled for December 4. Many Iowans wrote to Haugen requesting tickets to the gallery. Carrie Harrison wrote asking him to take charge of her gift to the new speaker. "A club that I belong to at West Union," she wrote, "have sent a flag staff from wood growing on the U.I.U. [Upper Iowa University] campus. I shall add the flag and if you will see that it is properly placed & tell . . . Col Henderson about it I shall be obliged."

Haugen benefited from Henderson's new position. "My assignments on the committees are very satisfactory," he wrote to Dow Simmonds, "being placed pretty well to the top: the highest of the new members, and ahead of several old members on the Agriculture and War Claims committee; and have been designated as chairman of the sub-committee of Farm and Dairy Products, Seeds and Plants; also member of sub-committee of Agl. Experiment Stations." He said this was unusually good treatment for a new man. "Our 'Dave' took excellent care of the Iowa members."

Haugen settled down quickly to the legislative routine and immersed himself in his work. The long work days and detailed committee work pleased him. He managed the many obligations of office with the same dexterity he had demonstrated as a young man juggling his many business ventures. Though late hours were "fashionable" in the Capital, he continued in his Iowa habit of rising early. His attendance at committee meetings and House sessions was exemplary, and his constituents were pleased with his prompt replies to their letters. Assisted by the able Comstock, he successfully dispatched each new task to his critics' begrudging surprise. His popularity with his constituents grew even more when the currency debate began in the House. Fourth District voters were concerned about the currency issue. In the late 1890s William Jennings Bryan and his followers were still advocating an

expanded money supply. Iowans elected Republicans to represent them in Congress in 1898, among other reasons because they assured the voters of their commitment to orthodox economic views including the gold standard. During the campaign Haugen had assured his voters of his orthodoxy; now he wrote home that the administration's currency bill was sure to pass, thanks to the votes of "every republican and quite a number of sound-money democrats."

Though he enjoyed his new role, Haugen missed his family and friends in Northwood. To his old friend Knudt Cleophas he admitted, "One cannot help feeling a little home-sick at times." The children missed their father, too. Norma wrote that Lauritz had asked his grandmother which direction Washington was so he could throw a kiss to his father. Unfortunately, the neighbor's barn stood between the kiss and the Capital. "[W]e told him that their (Ringham's) cow got them all and he didn't think it was quite fair." Despite Haugen's initial loneliness, he cancelled plans to return to Iowa during the holiday recess fearful lest the small-pox epidemic leave him quarantined in Northwood.

In April, 1900 Haugen sent a parcel to the boys at the bank containing cigars "from the President," and "a few other souvenirs." The latter proved to be bottles of champagne for his annual birthday party, this year to be conducted without the honored guest. Dow Simmonds and Timothy L. Ringham, Haugen's banking associates, informed Haugen of the event: "Saturday 4/28/1900, the bold Vikings of the land of the Midnight Sun salted by the Saurkraut of Germany and pepered by Yankeedom convened in the rooms of the Northwood Bkg. Co. at an exceedingly erly hour to partake of your princley generosity . . . We smoked the pipe of peace. We dranked the cup of cheer and at 12:30 it was most unanimously 'hic' agreed that 'hic' Haugen was bigger man 'nor' Dewey and 'hic' the best man on the Iowa dellegation in Congress and that the Northwood Banking Co. overshadowed the National City Bank of N.Y. or the Treas of the U.S."

At age 41, Haugen made his first speech in the House. His subject was of intense interest to the Fourth District — oleomargarine. At the turn of the century, Iowa led all states in butter production, accounting for one-tenth of the nation's supply. Iowa's 780 creameries were integral to this impressive record. As a farmer and early leader in the cooperative creamery movement, Haugen thoroughly understood and backed the dairy industry. But rapid increases in the manufacture, sale, and consumption of oleomargarine alarmed dairy farmers and butter makers. "Oleo," or "butterine" as it was also called, then consisted of animal fat combined with a small amount of cotton-seed oil. Giant meat packers such as Armour & Co., resented by farmers for their control of livestock markets, produced much of the nation's oleomargarine.

Addressing Speaker Henderson, Haugen began his maiden speech of December 7, 1900 with a barrage of statistics: "Mr. Speaker, we are confronted with the fact that the manufacture and sale of oleomargarine has grown from the insignificant sum of 21,513,537 pounds in 1888 to 83,000,000 in 1899, and to the enormous sum of 107,045,028 in the past year, a gain of 500 per cent in twelve years." Haugen explained his support of the "Grout bill" to prohibit the coloration of oleomargarine. "Purity and wholesomeness is the purpose of this legislation, and a protection to pure-butter producers against fraudulent

competition, as well as to reduce the price of oleomargarine to its consumers — that is, when sold in its natural color, and for what it is." The butter industry, he told the House members, deserved protection from "fraud and deception."

Haugen did not oppose the manufacture of oleo, only its sale to unwitting consumers as butter. He dramatized the need for legislation by buying in Chicago samples of several products labeled creamery butter, then having them analyzed in Department of Agriculture laboratories. Four of these samples proved to be oleo. Pointing out that 32 states already prohibited the coloration of margarine, Haugen concluded that "justice and the welfare of the public demands the passage of this bill." The "Grout bill" became law, but did not settle the oleo controversy that raged throughout Haugen's early career. His defense of butter and insistence upon accurate labeling were popular stands back home. Copies of the oleo speech were circulated in subsequent election campaigns.

Some congressmen loathed committee work; Haugen enjoyed it thoroughly. He spent long hours behind the scenes, reveling in the mountain of statistics generated by some bills. Besides butter, his chief concerns during his first term were a bill quarantining imported nursery stock and one promoting the sugar beet industry (destined to become important in the Mason City area economy).

When the agricultural appropriation bill came up for consideration, Haugen again took the floor. Francis W. Cushman, congressman from the State of Washington, wrote to him afterwards: "I was present in the House on the day you turned loose on the Agricultural Bill. You had been so quiet prior to that that I looked upon you as the silent man — but I know better now."

The Constituency

As busy as the new congressman was with committee work and sessions of the House of Representatives, he soon found that his legislative duties were only one part of his responsibilities. His constituents wanted a voice in the lawmaking process and had elected him to take a firm stand on currency reform and other issues of vital concern. They also expected him to represent them in another sense: they wished him to be their agent with the growing federal bureaucracy. Though northeast Iowa was a long train ride from the nation's capital, the area's businessmen, its newspaper editors, its farmers, its dairymen felt the influence of federal laws and agencies. All manner of citizens had business with the federal government: Civil War veterans wanting pensions, rural dwellers wanting mail delivery, young people wanting government jobs. In 1904 Haugen estimated that three-fourths of his correspondence was in reply to such requests for assistance.

Many constituents wrote to request government publications. In Iowa, agricultural subjects were the most popular, though many people received the *Congressional Record* regularly to keep up on the political debate. Each member of congress received the same allotment of the available publications with no considerations given to the differing needs of constituencies. Congressmen from the farm states ran out of the agricultural yearbooks and the other Iowa "best seller," *Diseases of the Horse*, while urban members let their copies pile up. Sometimes a trade could be effected by transferring an allotment from one member to another, but it was time-consuming and difficult to arrange. Haugen's new secretary Mert Comstock, experienced in Washington's ways, introduced Haugen to a

House Folding Room employee — George W. Perkins — who would arrange a trade for nearly any agricultural publication for a modest fee. At Perkins's request, an urban congressman would transfer publications to Haugen's account, receiving other books or even cash in exchange. Perkins's services were widely used — when Haugen introduced him to Wisconsin Congressman Herman Dahle, Perkins offered as references four members of the Wisconsin delegation with whom he had accounts.

Once the books were acquired, by legitimate allotment or through George Perkins's blackmarket, the Congressman's problems were not over. He still had to decipher requests like the following:

> Dear sir
> I must write you a few linds that I would like to get a book from you that you sent to Frank V. Kinkor and you send to him free and so you send me one for me Please send me one and be so good and gave it on post offies as soon as you can.

Haugen kept careful track of his dealings with his constituents. One of the useful devices was an alphabetical index listing all persons receiving publications. After checking the current volume, he mailed Kinkor's friend a copy of the *Agricultural Yearbook*.

Books were only one of the items dispensed. When the bass were "most all caught out" of the mill pond at Waucoma, Congressman Haugen forwarded to the United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries a request for fish to restock the pond. No one in the district found fault with free fish; the sending of free garden seeds was more controversial. Opponents of the practice charged it was a wasteful and expensive method for incumbents to curry favor with their constituents. Members used their charm (and their connections) to obtain a few more seed packets from the Department of Agriculture. Local postmasters supplied Haugen with names of "good Republicans." Comstock addressed the postage-free franks, and the operation became a major undertaking. In 1904, with fellow-Iowan James Wilson as Secretary of Agriculture, Haugen's consignment included 16,941 packages of vegetable seeds, 2,805 flower seed packets, 30 packages of grass seed, 105 trees, 40 grapevines, 150 strawberry plants and two packages of clover.

The Decorah *Public Opinion*, a paper hostile to Congressman Haugen, included some commentary on the practice in 1902. "Hip, Hip, Hoorah! Whoopee! Our package of seeds has come! Lettuce, muskmelon, parsley, tomato, parsnip! We take back every word we have said." To this the editor of the Fayette *Iowa Postal Card* replied in the May 8 issue, "The receipt of a package of seeds from a Congressman always affects some editors like laughing gas and sends them into small, amusing spasms of exhileration. The P.O. is scarcely entitled to a dozen mustard seed. But Haugen has a generous disposition."

Other recipients were more grateful. W.C. Eichmeier of Rockford reported his parsnips "elegant." Cate Hunter of Lime Springs said her seeds were "splendid" and proudly noted that she had won first prize at the fair. Bulbs and shrubs were reserved for special supporters. K.T. Anderson of Waterville properly expressed the pride that came with one of the rarer special gifts when he wrote: "My wife and I are very much obliged to you for the pictures and that box of bulbs you sent us. My wife very near jumped out of her shoes when she got the box opened and saw what was in it; you ought to seen her she grew about a foot."

Sometimes the town Democrats, though accustomed to being in the minority in rural Iowa, felt left out at seed time. In 1902, Haugen received a letter from a "friend and supporter" in Hesper suggesting that he send to a Democratic farmer who had expressed regret at being passed over, some seeds, a yearbook, and a copy of the oleo speech. The friend pointed out that the farmer "has three sons who are voters and a favor to the old gentleman might gain a vote or two." Haugen promptly added the name to his mailing list.

The list of items available from the government changed and grew through the years. Each item had its own government form and attendant problems. The end of the Spanish-American War added another bonus. August Huene, mayor of Guttenberg, wrote to Congressman Haugen May 26, 1899 to request a cannon for the city's river front park. Not to be outdone, West Union and Calmar citizens also applied.

Haugen discovered that shipping cannons was more troublesome than sending agricultural bulletins. Transportation was difficult to arrange and shipping times uncertain. Local sponsors were responsible for constructing the concrete base and usually did so long before the cannon arrived. In Decorah the eager townspeople prepared their pedestal on the courthouse lawn only to find when the cannon arrived that it did not fit — the Army had sent them the wrong plans. When the last cannon had been shipped and mounted, Haugen could breathe a sigh of relief. He had rounded up enough guns to please everyone; 17 cannons graced Fourth District towns.

By far the most time-consuming service performed for constituents was interceding in their behalf with the various departments of the federal government. In sheer numbers, pensioners were the most numerous and troublesome supplicants. Disability pensions for veterans of the Civil War and the Spanish-American War required not only physical examination by a Pension Examining Board of doctors, but also affidavits by former comrades. Witnesses to events that took place during the Civil War were difficult for an elderly veteran to recall, let alone locate. Attorneys handled cases for those who could afford it, but the bulk of the work fell to the local congressmen. Helping with pensions was an absolute necessity to keep the goodwill of the people in the district who had to assume support of an ailing old soldier or his widow if a pension failed to come through. In 1904 Haugen estimated he had been in "constant correspondence with 1100 soldiers in his district." "Constant" correspondence was a fitting description. Not only were there numerous proofs and documents to be supplied, but the department was notoriously slow. Some cases stood "pending" five years or more; many took several years to arrange, even with the most conscientious help.

When Comstock was not occupied at the Pension Commission he was likely in communication with the Superintendent of the Rural Free Delivery System. Rural mail delivery was begun in 1896 on an experimental basis. Immediately popular, the service was expanded until, by 1904, letterboxes with red signal flags were a common sight along country roads. To establish a route, rural residents filed an application with their congressman. Enclosed with the request for mail service was a map of the proposed route and a petition with the signatures of the prospective patrons. Once the application was forwarded to the Postmaster General, the citizens had only to wait for the government inspector

to travel the route, recommend changes or choose between disputed routes, and to approve or disapprove the application.

During the first five years of service, the Postal Department received thousands of requests. Congressmen and postal inspectors were hard pressed to keep up with the demand for routes and inspections, and rural patrons grew impatient with the long waits. Years later, speaking to a convention of rural carriers, Congressman Haugen recalled working until 2:00 a.m. to respond to the flood of rural delivery mail, only to be interrupted by a petitioner who had tracked the Congressman to his hotel to plead for early establishment of his mail route.

Which route to inspect first was a matter of considerable political import. The inspectors were willing to leave the entire matter to the congressman, though this was never revealed to the anxious patrons, many of whom had already ordered their newspaper subscriptions and their new mailboxes. George Nash wrote Haugen that he noticed Chickasaw County got its route established in three months while Floyd County routes had been pending over a year. "Chickasaw Co. is a close Co. Politically while Floyd is strong Republican," he observed. "So there may be a little politics mixed up with this."

There was more than a little politics involved. Because local dissatisfaction with congressional services was often blamed for the short tenures of members from the Fourth District, Haugen was eager to provide his district with as many routes as possible, as quickly as possible. Before the crucial 1902 election, Haugen used every means possible to cajole the Department into sending an inspector for an extended stay. He ensured the willingness of the inspector by providing him thoughtful comforts, like boxes of cigars and blue-point oysters at Christmas time. Thus won over, the inspector improved Haugen's chances at the polls by telling the patrons that their route was being inspected early through the influence of their congressman. In nonpivotal precincts the wait was long. One irate constituent lost his patience and wrote Haugen a caustic complaint. A day later he wrote Haugen a humble apology. "If I had had a little more patience," he wrote, "I would not have did it. The Establisher came the day after I wrote you, and established our route."

On rare occasions, the inspectors came too early to suit patrons. The postmaster of Elkader wrote Haugen one wet spring asking him to delay the inspector's visit until the roads again became passable. Sometimes natural disasters caused the abandonment of planned routes. Spring flooding in 1902 washed out many bridges in Allamakee County. Faced with the prospect of rebuilding bridges and "Every Mill Dam in the County" the citizens realized that mail delivery would have to be postponed another year. Thanking Haugen for his trouble, Edward Roese of Elon commented sadly that "the elements" had disapproved their application.

The most infamous privilege of a representative at the turn of the century was his patronage privilege. Despite early attempts at reform, many jobs could still be dispersed to faithful supporters. This "spoils system" operated by definite rules. The party holding the presidency controlled the positions. When representatives in Congress were of the same party they controlled appointments within their districts, and usually (together with the senators of the same party) decided on appointments in the state at large. If the congressman was of the opposing party, ap-

pointments were made by a senator of the proper affiliation or, if there were none, by some political manager or even by the defeated candidate for the congressional seat.

A few key positions fell to each district, but in sheer numbers the most significant appointments were the postmasterships. In a large town, the postmastership was a lucrative position. In smaller towns the income was a welcome supplement to the earnings of a storekeeper or often, a beleaguered newspaper editor. The postmaster was the congressman's local political officer. He or she was expected to be the congressman's eyes and ears, sensing the public mood and advising him of local dissatisfactions. It was the postmaster who provided lists of local Republicans to receive seeds, bulletins, and circular letters and saw to the signing of the congressman's nomination papers at election time.

Despite obvious political advantages, the system was not without hazards to the incumbent. He could not choose a candidate solely for political considerations since a bad choice could alienate an entire community if the postmaster, however politically adept, gave the town poor service or was abrasive. In fact, postmasterships were generally considered to be the eventual downfall of all congressmen. Every time a postmaster was chosen, the supporters of the losing candidate were disgruntled. Enough disgruntled factions meant instant support for a congressman's challenger. Post office contests were not only hotly disputed, they were also local political battles. It was difficult for a congressman in Washington, D.C. to analyze a disagreement correctly in a small town unfamiliar to him. The common practice, and the one Haugen originally followed, was to consult trusted friends from the area involved. After several bad mistakes, he learned that these men had their own biases and could not always be counted upon to give the advice best for Haugen.

The decision made, the timing of the appointment became crucial. Losing factions needed time to cool down before a congressional election, though postponing a decision too long could fuel a controversy and leave even greater numbers of voters dissatisfied. The *West Union Argo* of August 22, 1900 made light of the dilemma. "Congressman Haugen, of the Fourth district, is finding the Mason City post office a hard nut to crack. The term of the present postmaster, a Cleveland appointee, long since expired, but Mr. Haugen has not yet mustered up the courage to make a selection. . . . Meanwhile Mr. Miller, the present incumbent, has changed his political affiliations and is said to be an out and out Republican."

In 1902, Haugen hit upon a successful technique for handling the volatile post office appointments. His new campaign organization was drawn from every county in the district. He turned over to this group the post office battles that were jeopardizing his renomination. Working with the local party supporters and agreeing as a group on a candidate, they avoided personal bias and were generally successful. After the election he continued to consult them.

A few mistakes inevitably occurred. In 1903 he failed to reappoint L.L. Cole, the son of the editor of the local newspaper, *The Iowa Postal Card*. Editor O.C. Cole had been one of Haugen's most enthusi-

Note on Sources

An annotated copy of this article is available in the files of the Division of the State Historical Society. Most of the references are to items in the Society's Haugen Collection. A 72-page "Inventory of the Gilbert Haugen Papers" may now be consulted or purchased at the Society.

astic supporters during the 1902 campaign, and he had expected his son's appointment as reward for his services. The elder Cole never forgave Haugen for the slight. In the columns of his paper, he never again referred to Haugen by name, though it was not difficult to understand his allusions. In 1904, he commented on a Decorah paper's assertion that the Fourth District congressman was "growing stronger in Washington and at home" by adding: "May be, same as an onion." He took the opportunity to remind his readers that "not all black and white animals are domestic kittens."

For constitutents who sought Haugen's help, he was more than their governmental contact. For many, he represented ultimate authority: the man with the answer to any question; the means to any worthy end. In 1900 a Rockwell woman wrote him in great anguish. She had had no word from her brother, a soldier in Manila, for many months. Newspaper accounts of the Philippine insurrection listed a similar name among the dead and wounded. "I didn't know what else to do or who to write to unless it would be you, that may be you might find out for us whether he is dead or alive." Comstock went immediately to the War Department, and on February 12 the Congressman reported to Miss Jones that her brother had not been wounded and was now on duty in the interior. He included a corrected address and closed, "I am glad to do this small favor for you, and am still more pleased to hear that your brother is not dead or wounded."

Other personal problems were not so easily solved. In August, 1901 Haugen received a letter from George Anundson, the son of an acquaintance. Young Anundson's health was "failing fast," he wrote. He had been persuaded by a friend to lie about his age and enlist in the Marine Corps, but after three months of military life, he was so ill he expected he would not live much longer. The Navy Department was reluctant to release the youngster, even after learning his true age. "The Marine Corps is considerably short of authorized enlisted strength," the official communication read. As for his health, the Assistant Secretary dismissed the concern with a curt reply: "The Surgeon at the Naval Hospital at Norfolk reports that Private Anundson was admitted to the Hospital August 12, 1901 with venereal disease, and that he will probably be ready for duty in about two weeks." George's father, who wrote frequently, was worried the boy might desert if he was not honorably discharged. After numerous visits and exchanges of letters, the Department agreed to discharge the boy "by purchase." His father paid $100 and by February 22 George was on his way home, intending to stop over in Washington to thank Haugen. Instead of a thank you, the Congressman got a call from the police station. George, having spent the money he had been given for the trip to Iowa, had been arrested for vagrancy. Haugen saw to the boy's release and advanced him money for the trip home. His grateful father thanked Haugen once again for his help, admitting reluctantly that George was "generally free with money." Personal concerns were not trivial to the persons involved, or to a congressman who had to run for election every two years. In 1902 a key factor in Haugen's renomination was the campaign work of J. H. Anundson.

Whether it was settling a wager about whether Theodore Roosevelt was "Methodist or Lutheran" or a request from the city of Dubuque to have a gunboat named in its honor, Iowans were sure to get a prompt reply. Whenever Haugen was in Iowa he carried a memobook and jotted

down the names and requests of people he encountered. Once, when he lost a memo-book, he wrote a friend in Rockford asking him to locate "a doctor or a dentist, who has an office east of the hotel not far from the bridge" who had inquired about a pension for a soldier's orphan. Haugen had "looked into the matter" and enclosed a reply to be delivered "to the proper person."

Even Haugen's critics acknowledged his care. Fred Biermann, Democratic editor of the *Decorah Journal*, wrote an editorial in 1926 admitting that "G.N. Haugen is a good letter writer. He is a good man to secure any information or material in Washington any constituent may write for. . . ." To Biermann such matters were unrelated to a congressman's purpose and insignificant compared to a congressman's legislative duties. Haugen did not agree. March 11, 1904, in answer to a report listing him among 191 congressmen and senators who had tried to intercede with the Postal Department on constituents' behalf, Haugen defended his intervention. The House committee that released the report made clear that the legislators named had broken no laws, nor had they or their constituents received benefits except those to which they were entitled. As Haugen spoke — through the *Congressional Record* — to his colleagues in the House and to the voters at home, he made no apologies. "It is as much the duty of a Member of Congress to look after the interests of his constituents in the Departments as it is to come here and take part in the deliberations of this House. . . . I have been in constant correspondence with all of the Departments, persistently and conscientiously urging and demanding recognition for my district — my people — their claims." This bold declaration explained his responsiveness, his almost paternal concern, and, in part, his political longevity. When in later years, the machinery of government became more complex and the federal bureaucracy grew in size and impersonality, his insistence that each constituent mattered was almost an anachronism. When he broadened his "constituency" to include all the farmers in America in the 1920s, it was an outgrowth of this concern, rather than from any particular political ideology. □

CONTRIBUTORS

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BONNIE MICHAEL graduated with honors in European Literature and Thought from the University of Iowa in 1975 and has since continued graduate work in Business Administration. She was responsible for processing the Gilbert N. Haugen and Jonathan P. Dolliver papers in the State Historical Society's manuscript collection. She has also collaborated with Society director Peter T. Harstad on a biography of Haugen. Ms. Michael makes her home in a Cedar Bluff suburb with one husband, one dog, eight cats, four goats, and roughly 500,000 honeybees.