

THE PALIMPSEST

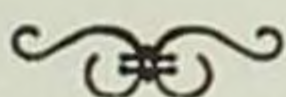
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Iowa Politics, 1848-1908

There have been twenty-six presidential elections since 1848, the first year that Iowans had a chance to participate in this great American "game of politics." In twenty of these twenty-six elections, Iowa "went Republican"; the other six times, the Hawkeyes voted for a Democrat. But the first two Democratic votes can be discounted — from the point of view of tradition — since they were cast before the birth of the Republican party. Only four times since that historic birth has Iowa lapsed from conformity — in 1912, 1932, 1936, and 1948.

The nation as a whole has not been quite so stubbornly Republican as has Iowa; between 1848 and 1948 the United States has elected a Whig once, a Democrat eleven times, and a Republican fourteen times. Another study of statistics will also show that Iowa has been on the winning side — whether Republican or Democratic — nineteen times out of the twenty-six. One might almost say "As Iowa goes, so goes the nation."

Iowa's first two presidential ballots favored Democrats, Lewis Cass and Franklin Pierce. But between 1852 and 1856 the Republican party was born, and when Iowans went to the polls in the latter year they gave 8,000 more votes to John C. Fremont, Republican, than to the Democratic candidate, James Buchanan, winner of the national election. By 1860 the nation joined Iowa in the Republican column and elected Abraham Lincoln.

From 1860 to 1880 Republican followed Republican in the White House without too much opposition from the Democrats. But in 1884, by a narrow margin, Democrat Grover Cleveland became President — without the help of Iowa voters, however. Political life returned to what had come to be considered "normal" in 1888, when the nation elected Republican Benjamin Harrison; but in 1892 Cleveland returned to office, Iowa again dissenting. In 1896, the Republicans, with William McKinley, came back into power by a safe majority. The White House was not again to welcome a Democrat until 1912.

Iowa voters endorsed the Republican victories of 1900, 1904, and 1908 — voting heavily for McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and William Howard Taft. But change was in the air, and the Republican craft, so firm and steady in the past, broke on the issue of Progressivism — a break which brought Woodrow Wilson and the Democrats to Washington.

Of all the elections in which Iowa had played a part since 1848, that of 1912 was outstanding in many respects. An Iowan, Albert Baird Cummins, for a time "stood in the shadow of the White House." In that year, also, the traditional party of Iowa was split in two by a gigantic battle, and when the smoke had cleared Iowa had broken with tradition and voted for a Democrat for President of the United States for the first time in sixty years.

MILDRED THRONE