

The Campaign of 1883

The gubernatorial campaign of 1883 is remembered in Iowa as one of the most remarkable political contests in the history of the State. Three parties were in the field, each supporting a candidate of superior ability for the office of Governor. Buren R. Sherman, who had already served one term as Governor and who had the reputation of being one of the best debaters in the State, was the Republican nominee for reëlection. Judge L. G. Kinne, without a doubt one of the ablest Democratic leaders in Iowa, was the choice of his party; while James B. Weaver, a fluent and forcible speaker, gifted with superior oratorical powers, was the standard-bearer of the Greenback party.

Scarcely had the campaign opened when the *Iowa State Register*, the official organ of the Republican party, published a long editorial on July 8th, "throwing down the gauntlet to the opposition". On the following day Judge Kinne telegraphed to Governor Sherman, challenging him to a series of joint debates to be held "at any place or places" upon which the two might agree, and inviting the Governor to meet him in Des Moines to arrange a schedule of dates. The challenge was accepted and ten days later an announcement was issued that the two candidates would appear in joint debates at the

cities of Independence, Postville, Webster City, Cherokee, Atlantic, Osceola, Oskaloosa, Mount Pleasant, Cedar Rapids, Dewitt, and Des Moines.

This announcement was sufficient to assure political enthusiasts that every question at issue between the two major parties would be adequately discussed in public. It did not, however, take cognizance of the Greenback party. Consequently, on July 17th, E. H. Gillette, campaign manager for General Weaver, sent messages to Judge Kinne and to Governor Sherman asking that Mr. Weaver be allowed to participate in the joint debates. Judge Kinne gave his approval to the proposed plan, provided Governor Sherman should agree. The Republican camp, however, was not to be thus quietly invaded by a political foe. Governor Sherman would debate the issues of the major parties with Mr. Kinne, but he did not choose to defend himself against the assaults of candidates of minor parties. Accordingly, the request was denied, with the explanation that a triangular debate would consume an undue amount of time, thus making the meetings too long. Moreover, it was pointed out that no wide variances existed between the Republican and Greenback parties. Indeed, it was claimed that upon the saloon question, "which so many regard as the most vital issue of the campaign," there was a complete agreement in these two parties. This was a plausible and diplomatic position from the Republican viewpoint. It at once eliminated General Weaver

from the joint debate and attempted to magnify the similarities of the two parties rather than their differences.

But Mr. Gillette was not to be thus easily evaded by cunningly devised political strategy. He proceeded immediately to make a series of appointments for General Weaver to speak in the evenings of the same days and at the same places where the other candidates were to meet in the afternoon for joint debate. This gave the Greenback candidate the advantage of large audiences without the disadvantage of a time limit.

The announcement of the schedule of joint debates appeared almost six weeks before the time fixed for the first meeting. This gave the press ample opportunity to advertise the program and to stimulate public interest in the contest. At Independence, on Wednesday afternoon, August 29th, the triangular campaign was formally opened by the first joint debate as announced. The day was all that could have been asked, bright in the morning with light hazy clouds in the afternoon. Flags hung from many buildings and at an early hour teams from the surrounding country began to bring in large numbers of people, while passenger trains from Dubuque, Manchester, West Union, Cedar Rapids, Waterloo, and other points were full to overflowing. By noon there were probably five thousand visitors, including many of the leading politicians of the State, waiting to attend the meeting.

Governor Sherman arrived by special train over the Illinois Central Railroad from Cedar Falls, where the day before he had reviewed the Second Brigade of the State militia. Republican headquarters were at the Turner House which was crowded with politicians and citizens. Judge Kinne came on the 10:40 train from Dubuque, where he had addressed a large political gathering the night before. Upon his arrival in the city he was escorted to the residence of Mayor Charles M. Durham where he was entertained and where he had his headquarters while in the city. General Weaver also arrived at 10:40 from Toledo where he had spoken the previous evening. He was entertained at the Wheeler House, where headquarters had been provided. Although he was not one of the joint debaters he was treated very much the same as if he had been accorded that honor.

By noon an immense crowd had gathered. The grounds at the courthouse square were elaborately decorated. Seats for about five thousand people were provided, and a platform large enough for the band, reporters, distinguished guests, and the speakers was erected. Several special police lent dignity to the occasion, while the Fourth Regiment band entertained the crowd, which began to assemble two hours before the speaking commenced. An hour before the meeting was called to order every available seat had been taken and about two thousand people were compelled to stand.

A few minutes before two o'clock General Weaver quietly took a seat in the grand stand and was greeted with cheers. A little later Governor Sherman and Judge Kinne appeared on the platform and were received with a wild display of enthusiasm and loud applause. When the noise had subsided H. W. Holman, chairman of the Republican county committee, announced that Governor Sherman would speak for an hour, Judge Kinne for an hour and a half, and then Governor Sherman would close the debate with a half hour rebuttal speech. He then introduced the Governor as the first speaker.

At the end of three hours when both the Republican and Democratic candidates had used their allotted time General Weaver asked the privilege of making an announcement. Judge Kinne agreed to grant him this privilege, but W. G. Donnan, speaking for the Republican forces, shouted, "Weaver, sit down. This is *our* meeting!" The meeting adjourned without Weaver's announcement. Later in the afternoon the Republicans attempted to arrange a joint debate between General Weaver and Colonel William P. Hepburn, a Republican member of Congress, but Weaver refused to debate with any one except "those of equal rank with him" — candidates for the office of Governor. So the Republicans announced that Hepburn would speak in the evening after Weaver had finished.

In the evening the crowd which again assembled in the park was almost as large as the one in the

afternoon. When General Weaver came upon the platform he announced, "I can now say to the Republicans that this is *my* meeting and that no Republican shall speak from this platform this evening, and there are a thousand men in this audience who will see that he don't". The excitement for a few moments was intense, but it soon subsided and Weaver spoke for three hours. Colonel Hepburn had to be content with delivering his speech at Independence two days later.

During the various joint debates the main issues of the campaign were argued pro and con. Governor Sherman in his opening speech declared that the people are sovereign and insisted upon their right to secure prohibition through a constitutional amendment. He spoke of national defense, of the war and its "disasterous consequences", of the great national debt, and of the vast sums that had been paid upon this debt during Republican administrations. He then referred to the growth of the school system, and of the manufacturing interests under the Republican policy of protection, the prosperous condition of the people as a whole, and the comfortable circumstances of the laboring men in Iowa. The Democratic party claimed to be a friend of the laboring man, he said, but the records proved quite the opposite. The homestead law, which was defeated three times by a Democratic Congress and President and was finally passed by a Republican Congress and signed by Abraham Lincoln, he asserted, had re-

sulted in many poor eastern men becoming prosperous and well-to-do western farmers.

Judge Kinne, after a few pleasant introductory remarks, dismissed a large part of the argument of his opponent as being "irrelevant to the issues of the day." Having discussed the Republican tariff record, he compared Iowa taxes with those of surrounding States, and then launched forth in a scathing denunciation of the "Republican cry of the home against the saloon." The Burlington *Hawk-Eye* had referred to his speech delivered at Greenfield a few days previous and had quoted him as saying: "I am in favor of a saloon on every hilltop, if necessary, and on every roadside, and on every street and thoroughfare, and in all public places. The more public the better." The Judge took occasion in his speech at Independence to deny most emphatically that he had made such a statement. He said, "I am not in favor of the saloon on the hilltop, as they report me in this respect. My political adversaries lie about me and have not the manhood to make honorable correction."

Governor Sherman replied that it made little difference to him or to the people of Iowa "whether Mr. Kinne made the remark ascribed to him at Greenfield or not. His speech here today", continued the Governor, "is evidence incontrovertible that he is in favor of a saloon not only on every hilltop, but everywhere, in every household of the State."

The intense excitement, the political intrigue, and the dramatic episodes which characterized this first meeting at Independence were in a large measure continued throughout the series. At Postville on the following afternoon the candidates addressed a crowd of about four thousand people. There the order of speaking was reversed, Judge Kinne having the opening and closing speech. Governor Sherman at the close of his remarks threw a political bomb at his opponent's position by asking him to explain what he meant by a "well regulated license law," insinuating that these words implied a contradiction of terms. To this Judge Kinne made no reply.

The Republicans again challenged General Weaver to a joint debate with Colonel Hepburn, but Mr. Weaver again declined. L. H. Weller, the only Iowa Greenbacker then in Congress, thereupon announced his willingness to meet Representative Hepburn on the stump, but the Colonel refused.

There was a ten-day interval between the date of the Postville meeting and the one at Webster City. During that time popular attention centered in the State Fair, and for a few days politics were neglected. But the Webster City debate revived interest in the campaign. Governor Sherman reviewed the work of the Republican party since the days of the Civil War. He said that the future could only be judged by the past and he did not believe that the people were ready to hand over the reins of government to a party which had never been the champion

of a great moral idea or a measure for the benefit of the laboring man. When Judge Kinne was introduced he referred to the past, concerning which his opponent had spoken, as a "graveyard". He devoted the greater part of his time to a discussion of the tariff question, provoking frequent laughter by ridiculing the "free list". In the evening General Weaver spoke at the opera house, while Colonel Hepburn held a Republican meeting at the courthouse.

Rainy weather interfered somewhat with the meeting at Cherokee on September 13th. Despite this fact, however, about three thousand people attended. The program was very similar to the one at Webster City two days before.

At Atlantic political enthusiasm was again at flood tide. The Republicans stole a march on the Democrats by securing the services of a brass band. Governor Sherman was escorted to the open forum by the band, the Republican committee, and about two hundred members of the Republican Club, while Judge Kinne walked quietly to the place of meeting, accompanied only by a few intimate friends. Both speakers were at the zenith of their oratorical powers. Excitement was rampant. While Governor Sherman was making the closing speech some of the Democrats tried to make a disturbance but did not succeed. Some one who attempted to announce General Weaver's meeting was impatiently "cried down". In the evening Weaver spoke at the opera

house, while Judge C. C. Cole held a Republican meeting at the skating rink. This was the last attempt made by the Republicans to oppose the Weaver meetings.

The remaining joint debates were not unlike those already described. At Osceola more than seven thousand people attended the meeting. "Both speakers were feeling excellently and both made probably their best speeches at this place." In the afternoon the Democratic ladies of Osceola presented Judge Kinne with "the finest bouquet of flowers ever seen in the city." The Republicans announced a meeting for Colonel Hepburn in the opera house and challenged General Weaver to meet him, but as usual he declined. It was learned later that the whole affair was a camouflage — Hepburn was not in the city at all.

The debate at Oskaloosa on the twenty-second of September was anticipated as the greatest meeting of the series, but rain again interfered. At Mount Pleasant three days later between five and six thousand people were present. "Both speakers were applauded by the audience indiscriminately", and both presented able arguments. At the close of Governor Sherman's speech he was presented with four magnificent bouquets by the ladies of Mount Pleasant and Burlington. General Weaver spoke as usual in the evening.

Only three meetings of the series remained. At Cedar Rapids on the twenty-ninth of September both

speakers were a little hoarse from the long-continued campaign, and the arguments were not quite up to the previous standard. Despite the fact that inclement weather again interfered at Dewitt, about three thousand people attended the meeting, and "remained almost to a man." Members of the band augmented the applause by joining with their instruments.

At the final meeting in Des Moines on October 3rd about thirty-five hundred people were present. No more could get within hearing distance on account of the strong wind which swept the courthouse square. Governor Sherman was a little hoarse, although otherwise he was feeling "in the best of trim". Both speakers delivered essentially the same speeches as at Independence at the opening of the campaign; both candidates were congratulated by their many friends at the close of the meeting; and both parties seemed well pleased with the efforts of their champions, each confident of victory at the polls six days later.

Various reports were circulated as to the merits of the joint debates. Certainly the issues of the campaign were thoroughly discussed. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the newspapers in reporting the speeches indulged in an unusual amount of repartee and satire. A Republican paper in speaking of the debate at Independence said: "There is no question as to the result of this meeting in the minds of the people of Buchanan County. It was a com-

plete triumph for Governor Sherman and Iowa republicanism, and will insure a sweeping Republican success in the county in October. Kinne was completely routed by Sherman's closing remarks, and, though called for at the close by his party friends, did not respond."

The Democratic press in referring to Governor Sherman's speech on the same day said it was a "flat failure", and accused him of resorting to history to avoid a discussion of current political issues. "He took a metaphorical snooze", they said, "and woke up about a quarter of a century back, prowled around with nightmare's long handled spade and exhumed issues that died, were buried, and wandered into oblivion before the present generation saw light. He raked over the musty pages of by-gone times, and told the people, who had come so far to hear the 'living issues of the day,' about Brooks' attack on Sumner, about the extension of slavery into territories, the birth of the republican party, the beginning and prosecution of the war, its termination after a carnival of blood and an avalanche of consequent debt, all of which he, with herculean effort, saddled onto the terrible shoulders of democracy". The Governor's closing speech, it was averred, "left him in no better plight than his opening splatter, and left every one present with the impression that he is no competitor in any possible sense in a joint discussion with Judge Kinne."

General Weaver was portrayed as a political camp

follower of the Republican party. Newspapers variously referred to him as "a disappointed office seeker", or as a candidate "having no hopes of success".

The Chicago *Tribune* was of the opinion that the joint debates placed the candidates before the public "under the light of severe contrast." It seemed incredible that Mr. Kinne was "as bad a man as his speeches would indicate." He "wears the Democratic uniform", wrote the *Tribune*, "but is really a bushwhacker between the lines, and fires in both directions. He strikes Prohibitionists and protective-tariff men in his own ranks as often as among the enemy, and it is quite likely he is killing off more Democrats than Republicans."

The Des Moines *Iowa Staats Anzeiger*, a Democratic German paper, on the contrary, was even more vociferous in its denunciation of the Republican cause. It declared that this campaign "will be noted in history for a century to come as having produced the most stupendous liars the world ever knew, and that those liars were wholly on one side — on the side of the party that professes to hold all the moral and virtuous element of the nation, the Republican party."

Throughout the series of debates the best of feeling prevailed among the speakers themselves. It is probably a fair estimate to say that at Oskaloosa and Dewitt the meetings were advantageous to the Democrats. At Cherokee, Mount Pleasant, and

Cedar Rapids they were more favorable to the Republicans, while at the other cities neither side seems to have had any decided advantage. Governor Sherman's strength was shown in his frankness, his earnest style, and in his wonderful fund of information on all public questions. Judge Kinne's power lay in his clear reasoning, his sarcasm, and his fine voice; while General Weaver was prominent for his oratorical powers and his ready wit.

All in all the campaign of 1883 was one of the most remarkable in the history of the State. Governor Sherman was reëlected, although Judge Kinne carried twenty-one counties, polling an overwhelming majority in the Democratic strongholds of Dubuque and Davenport. James B. Weaver was far behind, winning only twenty-three thousand votes out of a total of over three hundred and twenty-seven thousand.

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