

A Whig of Many Parts

Political ambition motivated the Wallace family of Henry County. Benjamin Franklin Wallace, the elder son, was a candidate in 1838 for the position of Delegate to Congress, while his younger brother, William Henson Wallace, solicited the electors as candidate for the Territorial House of Representatives. The defeat of Benjamin F. highlighted the success of his brother.

Elected as "an ardent Whig", William Wallace found himself among the minority in the House. His triumph at the polls, however, was only the preface to a more significant victory. On the second day of the session, "Hank", as he was familiarly called, was elected Speaker. With four competitors (John Frierson, Thomas Cox, Andrew Bankson, and James W. Grimes), he received eleven of the twenty tabulated votes. This was remarkable because the House was predominantly Democratic.

William H. Wallace was well and favorably known in the southern portion of the Territory. Before he had lived in the Black Hawk Purchase a year he became active in promoting the division of Wisconsin Territory. He was sent as a dele-

gate from Henry County to the convention that met in Burlington in November, 1837, to petition Congress for the creation of the Territory of Iowa.

An anecdote indicative of his talent for popularity occurred during his campaign of 1838. The voters of Lockridge said that they would not vote for any one who failed to join in the festivities of their barbecue and the hilarity of their stag dance. Wallace won enthusiastic support with his spirited gaiety.

Born in Troy, Miami County, Ohio, on July 19, 1811, William H. Wallace was twenty-seven when he rode to Burlington for the First Legislative Assembly. He had come to Iowa in 1837, having previously migrated from his native State to Indiana where he received his common school education. In contrast to Jesse B. Browne, who was President of the Council and the tallest man in the upper chamber, Wallace who was Speaker of the House was the smallest of the Representatives. Nevertheless, a contemporary said he was "impressive in person, manner and voice."

During the first session of the Territorial legislature, one of the major issues was the location of a permanent seat of government. Through a controversy of petty jealousies and ardent localism, Wallace was a faithful supporter of the interests of Mount Pleasant. He seems to have been a

satisfactory presiding officer, maintaining decorum and conducting parliamentary business impartially.

On one occasion, during a discussion of a project to improve Muscatine slough, Robert G. Roberts of Cedar County arose and challenged the House. "Mr. Speaker, is Cedar in that air thing? If Cedar is not in that air thing, I will not support it!" Without hesitation Wallace informed the gentleman that Cedar was "not in that air thing". Hawkins Taylor, who represented Lee County in the House, declared that he had "never seen finer presiding officers, in legislatures or Congress," than Browne and Wallace.

Wallace did not return to the House in 1839. In the following year, however, he was elected to the Council and reelected in 1842, thus serving in the Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Legislative Assemblies. In the Fifth Assembly, he was President pro tem of the Council and in the sixth session he was the Whig candidate for President. By 1843, however, Wallace was ready for larger fields. He opposed Augustus C. Dodge for the office of Delegate to Congress. Both of the candidates stumped the Territory, speaking in nearly all the counties. But when the votes were counted Dodge again went to Washington as Delegate.

When Iowa reached Statehood, a bitter parti-

san strife prevented the legislature from choosing the first United States Senators. In the Second General Assembly, however, the Democrats had a majority in both branches. William H. Wallace received the empty compliment of being the nominee of the Whig caucus. On the afternoon of December 7, 1848, Philip B. Bradley named Augustus C. Dodge for the Democrats and Hugh R. Thompson proposed William H. Wallace for the Whigs. There was no doubt as to the outcome: Dodge was elected as one of the first Senators from Iowa by a vote of thirty-eight to nineteen.

In spite of his membership in a dying party, Wallace's interest in public affairs never flagged. In 1848, as a Whig candidate for Presidential elector, he was defeated by the Cass ticket. During the administration of Millard Fillmore, however, he was United States Receiver at the Fairfield land office, a position which he filled until the advent of President Franklin Pierce. On February 13, 1852, he presided at a railroad convention in Ottumwa interested in the construction of the Lafayette, Burlington, and Council Bluffs Railroad. The next year Wallace answered the call of the West and migrated to Washington Territory, where a new political future awaited him.

About this time William H. Wallace was described "as being a young lawyer who was genial

in his intercourse with the people, popular in his manners and possessed of great magnetic powers, which won the admiration and esteem of his followers." Through the late fifties his warmth of personality made him a leading figure in his newly adopted home.

In politics he experienced a renaissance. Elected to the Washington Legislative Council in 1855, he was chosen President of that body in the following year. Meanwhile, during the Indian outbreaks, he served as captain of the militia in the suppression of the red men. In Iowa he had been elected colonel of the Territorial militia.

The reason for Wallace's sudden success was his change of political affiliation. He had become a Republican. In April, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln appointed him Governor of Washington Territory. The people of the Territory, however, had already elected him to be Delegate to Congress. And so, instead of going to the Territorial capital, Wallace went to the national capital. From March 4, 1861, to March 3, 1863, he attended the sessions of the Thirty-seventh Congress.

At the close of his term, he had been home only a few months when President Lincoln on July 10, 1863, appointed him Governor of the new Territory of Idaho. Through the summer and early

autumn, Governor Wallace was busy organizing the Territorial government. Then, in the September election, he was elected first Delegate to Congress from Idaho. Wallace thus occupied the unique position of serving Washington in the Thirty-seventh Congress and representing Idaho in the Thirty-eighth.

Delegate Wallace comported himself with distinction. During both terms he favored internal improvements — the building of highways and the construction of railroads. He also advocated “hard money” and urged a liberal policy toward the Indians. While the bill relative to the creation of Montana was debated, he proved to be a staunch friend of the proposed statute. His speeches were examples of logic and conciseness, and throughout his career he was noted as a polished orator. On several occasions he disputed with J. B. Grinnell on the issue of economy in public expenditures. Wallace saw no reason to purchase future inequalities at the price of immediate economy. His hobby while in Washington seemed to have been the amicable settlement of controversies between the settlers and the Indians. Certainly he actively promoted the interests of the Territories he represented.

After the Thirty-eighth Congress had adjourned in March, 1865, Wallace returned to

Washington Territory and established his home at Steilacoom on Puget Sound near Tacoma. Tired of politics, a career which he had so long pursued, he sought contentment during his last years musing about the past. He died on February 7, 1879. It was a tribute to his sincerity and ability that friend and political foe both praised his deeds.

William H. Wallace tried to promote the public good. Fortune smiled and frowned upon his efforts. Through the years of American political growth this Whig of many parts kept a firm grasp upon the ideal of public service. Without men like him neither Territories nor States could fulfill their highest destiny.

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