

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Election of 1843

One of the most turbulent political contests in the early history of Iowa occurred in the summer and autumn of 1843. Whereas the campaign in the previous year had centered around the question of the admission of Iowa into the Union, the 1843 election concentrated attention on the selection of a Delegate to Congress. Because the 1842 proposal for calling a constitutional convention had been defeated by a vote of 6825 to 4129, the Democrats, who had advocated Statehood, deemed it wise to let the issue drop for at least a year. The Whigs, opposed to Statehood for fear of increased taxes, were also glad to avoid that issue. Election results of 1842 had slightly enhanced the power of the Whigs, but the election of 1843 was destined to be a triumph for the Democrats.

Residents of the Territory of Iowa were awakened from their every-day living habits in April when the Burlington *Hawk-Eye* and the Iowa



*City Standard* began discussing the coming October elections. The two Whig papers suggested likely candidates of their party for the office of Delegate. Ralph P. Lowe was mentioned by the Burlington newspaper and William H. Wallace was the choice of William Crum, editor of the *Standard*. In mentioning the name of Wallace, a member of the legislature, Crum wrote: "The Whig cause has no more efficient supporter, nor would any more closely press the enemy in the contest." The editor also claimed that Wallace was the choice of more than three-fourths of the Whig members in the legislature. Because of this, Crum suggested that a candidate might be agreed upon by holding county conventions in the twenty counties then organized.

The Whigs were further stirred to action by an editorial printed in the *Davenport Gazette* during the first week in April. It admonished the Whigs to "go systematically to work, nerved by the stern determination that Iowa shall no longer be represented by Locofocoism. Let meetings be held in every county, all aiming at the convention of a mass meeting at the Capitol. Let committees be appointed in each precinct to bring the Whigs together . . . to awaken the disaffected from the lethargy which recent events have conspired to produce, and by concert action to so organize the



party that all the wily trickery of Locofocoism will be unable to swerve them from that duty which they owe their country, their party and themselves."

Early in May a central committee of five men was appointed to organize the Whigs in the various counties of the Territory. On May 24th this group issued a notice requesting partisans to hold primary meetings in each county and "determine whether, under all the circumstances, it is expedient to hold a Territorial Convention." If a convention should be approved by the county caucuses, they were requested to appoint delegates, equal in number to their representation in the legislature. July 4th was the date proposed for the Territorial convention, providing a majority of the counties voted "yes" for the meeting. This date was later changed to July 19th in the belief that the counties had not had sufficient time to organize.

While the Whigs were banding together for the coming political battle the Democrats, too, were holding county meetings and organizing. They were preparing to combat "all the tricks, treachery and humbuggery of which whiggery is so notoriously productive." After the first few county meetings it became apparent that the incumbent Delegate, Augustus Caesar Dodge,



would be the choice of his party for renomination to that office. Nevertheless a Territorial convention was scheduled for June 26th at Iowa City.

The day of the Democratic convention arrived and at ten o'clock in the morning the forty-five delegates started a parade from the main Iowa City hotel to the capitol. Led by Samuel Trowbridge, Iowa City postmaster, the group wended its way to Representative Hall in the capitol carrying banners with such inscriptions as "Stick to the Party" and "Augustus Dodge". James H. Gower of Cedar County was appointed chairman for the meeting. The morning was spent in preparing an address to the "Democracy of the County", and in electing officers of the convention. Shortly after two o'clock Amos Ladd of Lee County arose from his chair to nominate Dodge as candidate of the Democratic party for Delegate to Congress. The nomination was accepted by acclamation.

In the address prepared earlier by a special committee, Dodge was described as being "so well and so favorably known to the people of Iowa, that reference to him at length would be quite superfluous. He has been in their service for three years and can therefore appeal to the past for evidence of his faithful stewardship. With what untiring zeal and success he has labored for



our common interests is known to all, and attested in the deep hold he has upon the affections of his constituents." Following the reading of the message to the Democrats and also speeches by Edward Johnstone of Lee County, Thomas Rogers of Dubuque County, and James P. Carl and Curtis Bates of Johnson County, the convention adjourned.

One unknown Whig who attended the convention (he must have been admitted by mistake) described the convention as a farce and added: "The committee reported and read an address which was adopted forthwith. Several members having dropt asleep during the reading were awakened to vote for the adoption of the reported address . . . when the very modest, retiring and interesting young man from Dubuque who misrepresented the north in the Legislature last winter, was called upon. The most uninterested spectator would have been struck with his remarkable appearance and his very striking physiognomy; it appeared as if a drum and fife would be required to call together the few scattered hairs that bore the appearance of having been forced out from his frog-mouthed visage by balm of Columbia, or some other hair growing remedy."

Following the close of the session, five members



were selected to inform Dodge of his nomination by the convention. When the news reached him at his home in Burlington it was received gratefully by the veteran politician. Immediately he began to map his campaign for the coming months.

All was not well, however, amongst the Whigs who could not agree upon the Territorial convention scheduled for July 19th. Johnson County members and several newspaper editors thought a convention would be "inexpedient" but other counties had previously voted to hold the meeting. It was finally decided by the central committee that a convention to select a candidate would be needless as William H. Wallace was considered the logical man. It was with great pleasure, indeed, that Editor Ver Planck Van Antwerp, of the *Iowa City Capitol Reporter*, wrote on the day set for the conclave: "The 19th instant was a day which will long be remembered in the annals of whiggery, as the day on which the Whig Convention met for the nomination of a candidate for Delegate to Congress in opposition to Gen. Dodge. . . . So great was the rush that the Capitol was filled to overflowing."

After the failure of the convention it was recognized by most Whigs that Wallace was their candidate. Ralph P. Lowe had, in the meantime, dropped out of the Whig race for the candidacy.



Wallace was called a "harbinger of good" by his party and "servile, designing and covert" by Democrats. He was actually an ardent champion of a tariff for revenue and for protection to industries within the United States. He also favored a national bank, paper money rather than hard metal, and an equitable pro rata distribution of the revenue arising from the sale of public lands. Minor points in his platform were: one term for the President of the United States, restoration of the country's credit, and revival of her credit abroad.

Dodge, true to the Democratic cause, strongly opposed a bank and desired no tariff of any kind except on lead. He declared himself to be a friend to an "entire and exclusive hard money currency", which one Whig sarcastically quipped was "hard to be got". Also the Democratic platform proposed that the Territory of Iowa should become a State in order to get the benefit of the Federal land grant for public schools. This resolution was not mentioned, however, during the ensuing months.

The campaign for the Delegate's seat unofficially began when Dodge spoke to a large audience at Keosauqua early in July. There, he made a fiery speech against the Whig policy of supporting a tariff and a national bank. Presently Wal-



lace, also, began canvassing the counties of the Territory in an attempt to win more Whig votes.

The campaigns of both men had not progressed far before Whigs and Democrats, alike, clamored for a joint stumping tour. They desired to hear the men debate the conflicting issues of the two parties. During the first week in August, Dodge invaded Henry County, where Wallace lived, to make several addresses. He informed his opponent of his itinerary and expressed the wish that Wallace accompany him on the tour. When Wallace failed to appear with Dodge at Mount Pleasant he was accused of being "afraid to meet his opponent on the stump."

Whigs came to the defense of their candidate by explaining that Wallace had received the Dodge note too late, for he had already made speaking engagements which he felt he could not break. Wallace decided to keep his appointments and absorb the bitter words of the Democratic candidate and his followers. Finally, after failing to meet Wallace at Eddyville and Harrisburg, Dodge overtook him at Brighton. There, the two men planned a tour of many towns, touching almost every county in the Territory.

Their stumping tour got under way when the two candidates met at Iowa City on Wednesday, August 23rd. Dodge commenced the program



with an hour-and-a-half tirade against Wallace and Whig principles. His adversary followed with a much shorter address explaining why he favored the establishment of a national bank and the necessity of a tariff. His speech was, according to Whigs, shorter but much more convincing. Editor Van Antwerp wrote, "Mr. Wallace commenced with 'I have *saw* occasion,' and concluded with 'I hope at the polls in October, my fellow citizens will record their votes for William H. Wallace!' This is sufficient proof that Mr. Wallace is not only a man of genius, but a man of invincible modesty."

Dodge and Wallace then spoke at Dubuque on September 2nd and left soon after for a stumping tour which took them to Rochester and Tipton. They returned to Dubuque for their second debate there on September 8th. Wallace charged his opponent with an attempt to get appropriations from Congress for the improvement of the lower Des Moines River rapids and divert money intended for construction of roads and canals in interior Iowa. Dodge claimed he had sought, but unfortunately had not received, money for both the upper and lower rapids. The editor of the Dubuque *Miners' Express* wrote of the address of Wallace: "We might speak of his sins against syntax, history and logic, but knowing he will be



beat by more than a thousand, we think it ungenerous to attack a doomed foe." Throughout the entire tour of the two men, they traveled together by carriage and horseback, slept and ate together. But once on the stump each vigorously denounced the other and lauded his own party. Dodge always spoke first and Wallace followed. Wallace, and his party, complained that Dodge interrupted Wallace in the middle of his address "so as to foil a good speech."

An amusing incident occurred when the two rivals spoke to a group which had gathered on the prairie outside the county seat of Clayton County. The men were late in arriving at the place of meeting but at last rode up on their horses, dismounted, and, after turning their horses out to graze, entered a small ring and introduced themselves. Dodge then climbed on a stump, hewn on two sides, and began to spellbind his audience. He spoke for more than an hour. During Wallace's talk a large snake entered the ring and was driven away, only to reappear after a lapse of several minutes. Some people took the part of the snake and said it should remain, others disagreed and a near riot resulted. It remained for General Dodge to request order for his opponent and Wallace's address was resumed.

As the election drew near, the men finally ter-



minated their tour and each headed for his home county to fortify himself among his neighbors. While the candidates for Congress had been campaigning, rivals for the various county and district offices had also been active.

Election day arrived on October 3rd and voters of the Territory of Iowa went to the polls with firm partisan convictions and confidence in their favorite candidates. Interest centered, of course, in the principal office to be filled, that of Delegate to Congress. When the ballots were counted, it was clearly evident that Dodge had been reëlected by a total vote of 6084 to 4812. He carried all but five counties, polling the largest majorities in his home county of Des Moines and in Lee, Van Buren, Jefferson, Jackson, and Dubuque. Wallace carried his home county of Henry, as well as Washington, Johnson, Muscatine, and Scott by narrow margins. The vote in Jones County was a tie, eighty-eight to eighty-eight.

In the election of members to the Territorial House of Representatives the Democrats were likewise successful. There was a rather surprising change of personnel, for only seven members of the previous session were returned. Nineteen of the twenty-six Representatives were Democrats. The seven Whigs came from Lee, Des Moines, Henry, Scott, and Jones counties.



And so, a hundred years ago, Iowa went Democratic. Augustus C. Dodge returned to Washington to sit beside his father, Henry Dodge, newly-elected Delegate from the Territory of Wisconsin. Wallace moved to the Territory of Washington soon after his defeat — where, presently, he was chosen Delegate to Congress. Newspaper editors began a search for new topics to fill their editorial columns so recently occupied with angry utterances against the opposing party. And the people of the Territory again settled down to normal living with political conversation giving way to the weather, crops, and neighborhood affairs.

REEVES HALL