

Campaign Collections

Reminders of Iowa's Political Past

EVERY FOUR YEARS, the political passions of Americans rise to a fever pitch between summer conventions and the fall election. By the time the president-elect is inaugurated in January, the speeches have ended, the buttons and signs have disappeared, and television has resumed advertising for consumers, not voters.

As Iowans approach Election Day 1992, a relevant exhibit at the State Historical Building infuses campaign fervor back into political issues and objects of the last century and a half. On the following pages, you'll find a sampling from this exhibit, "Winnowing the Field: Candidates, Caucuses, and Presidential Campaigns in Iowa."

These objects symbolize the messages, and the materials that conveyed those messages, through five periods in American politics. Exhibit curators Jack Lufkin and Michael O. Smith define the dominant issues and the methods of promoting candidates.

Obviously, the political message has changed — from abolition to prohibition to the Cold War. But so has the medium: from torchlight parades to celluloid buttons to television. As historian Michael McGerr points out in his *The Decline of Popular Politics* (1986), strategies have evolved from spectacles (building party loyalty through local rallies and parades), to education (informing voters of the issues), to advertising (focusing on the candidate).

Despite the ephemeral nature of campaign items, the State Historical Society collections include hundreds of these reminders of Iowa's political past, which we're pleased to share with you in this election year. —*The Editor*

Photos by Chuck Greiner

Campaign badge for Iowan William B. Allison, a contender for the 1888 GOP presidential nomination.

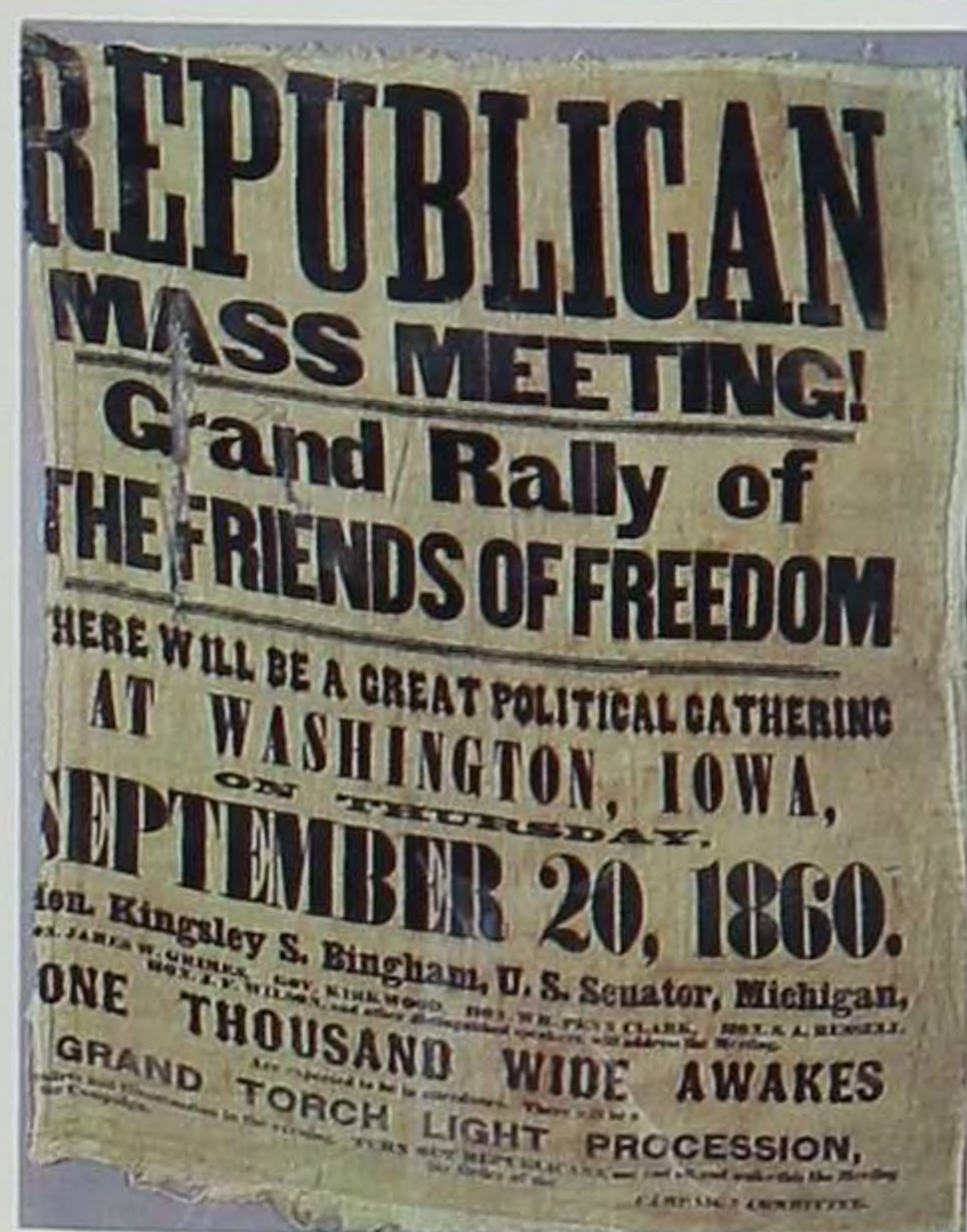
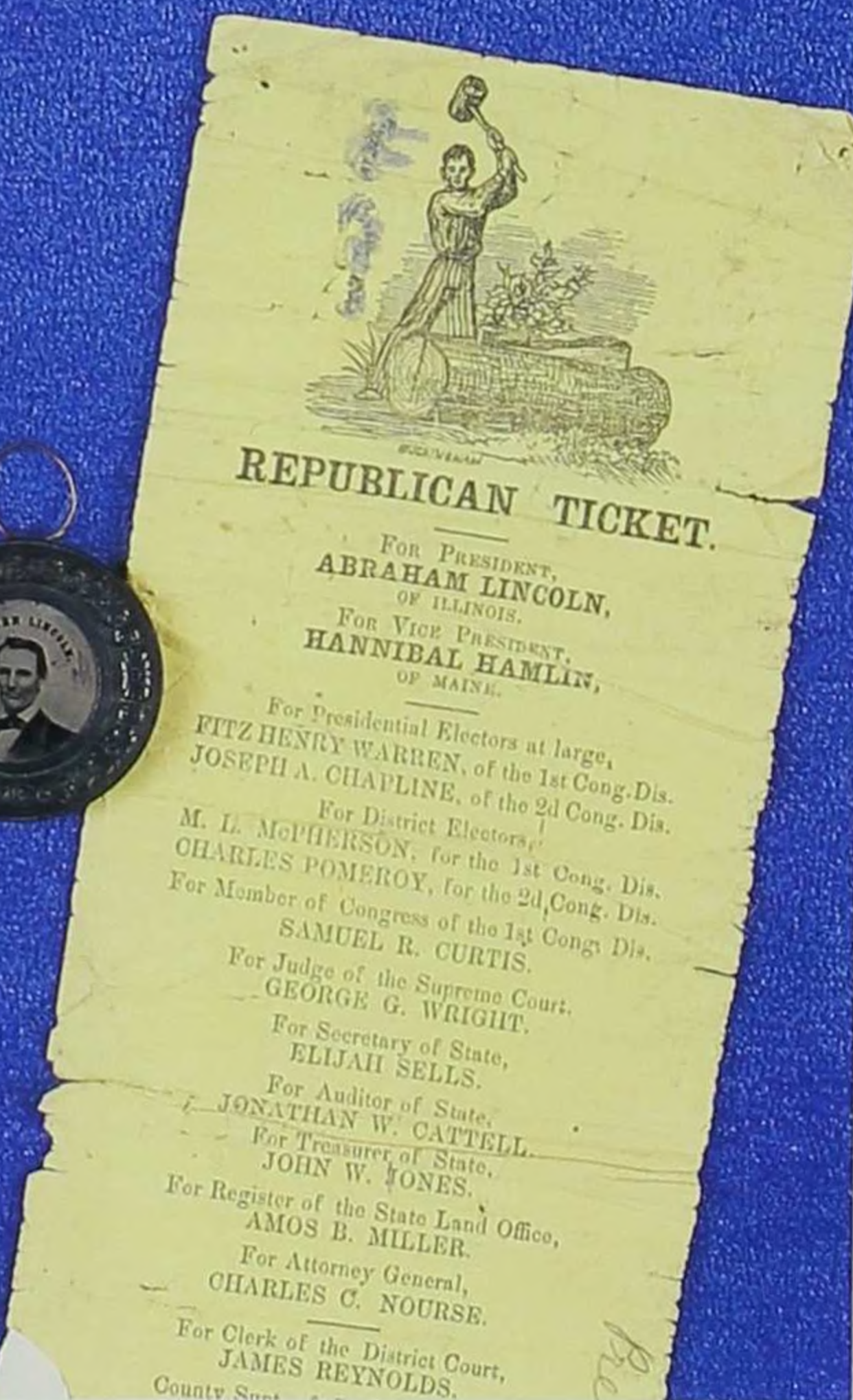


1848–1872: The Messages

Militant abolitionist John Brown (in portrait) epitomized searing political issues of the mid-nineteenth century — slavery and sectional differences between the North and South. The 1856 broadside notifies Iowans of the May 21 sacking of Lawrence, Kansas, by “border ruffians” and proslavery forces. Brown’s terrorist tactics — in a Kansas massacre May 24 and later

at Harpers Ferry, Virginia — are symbolized by the brass tube cannon, purportedly used in training his Iowa followers. Sectionalism and slavery issues contributed to the development of the Republican party in the 1850s. Its crusade to end slavery carried the party to power, sustained it through the Civil War, and kept Republicans in office long after the war.





The Medium

Campaign tactics in the mid-nineteenth century focused on appeals to the common man and party loyalty. The blue ribbon calls the first Republican candidate John C. Frémont "THE PEOPLES' CANDIDATE" in the 1856 campaign; and the yellow straight-party ballot, listing the entire 1860 Republican ticket, reminds voters of Abraham Lincoln's log-cabin and rail-splitter background. The small tintype (or ferrotype) of Lincoln features running mate Hannibal Hamlin on the back. Tintype images of candidates were first used in 1860. INSET: Mass meetings and rallies, parades and marches, drew enthusiastic crowds for two-hour "stump" speeches.

1876–1896: The Messages

A street lantern for the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) symbolizes the ongoing issue of the Civil War in post-war politics. The GAR, an association of Union war veterans, was closely aligned to the Republican message of victory, patriotism, and Union; veterans successfully ran for office in many elections. Also in this period, Iowa farmers shifted from wheat to corn as the dominant crop and would win

wide recognition, here symbolized by a 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition trophy. Nevertheless, populist leaders advised, "What you farmers need to do is raise less corn and more hell!" INSET: Granger banner from Clarke County, Iowa. Primarily a cooperative rural social and educational movement, the Grange favored railroad regulation to protect farmers from high shipping costs.





The Medium

Against a Benjamin Harrison bandanna with party platform slogans, an array of campaign items shows a trend beginning in 1876 — both parties relying on more party-created materials. Upper left: An 1887 woven silk picture (called a Stevengraph after inventor Thomas Stevens) of Grover Cleveland. Beside it, 1892 campaign badge made of mother-of-pearl, and (far right) 1888 badges of silk ribbon and metallic fringe. INSET: Celluloid-covered buttons, first used in the 1896 campaign, soon became commonplace. Clockwise from top: William McKinley, 1896; McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, 1900; Roosevelt and Charles W. Fairbanks, 1904; William Taft, 1908; and William Jennings Bryan, 1896. Along with mass-marketed trinkets came more printed material to educate the electorate: editorials, newspaper articles, and campaign handbooks (with platforms, candidate biographies, speeches, and song lyrics).



1900–1928: The Messages

Handkerchiefs and bandannas (1912) sporting Theodore Roosevelt and his “Rough Rider” image (from the Spanish-American War) form a backdrop for political issues in the first two decades of the new century — woman suffrage (fan) and prohibition (sticker). By 1916 woman suffrage had won support from both presidential candidates; in 1920 it became law. INSET: Prohibition of alcohol resurfaced periodically as a political issue. Until national prohibition

was adopted in 1920, the Republican party — and many Iowans — vacillated between strong and weak measures and between “wet” and “dry” stances. (The slogan “NO BLIND PIGS WANTED” refers to after-hours, illegal saloons.)





The Medium

A German-language campaign brochure pushes William H. Taft for president (as does the large celluloid button). Political pamphlets were written in foreign languages to appeal to various ethnic groups. By 1900 phonograph records also carried campaign messages (here, William Jennings Bryan's speech on "The Railroad Question"). Political postcards were also a campaign innovation, after the 1898 repeal of

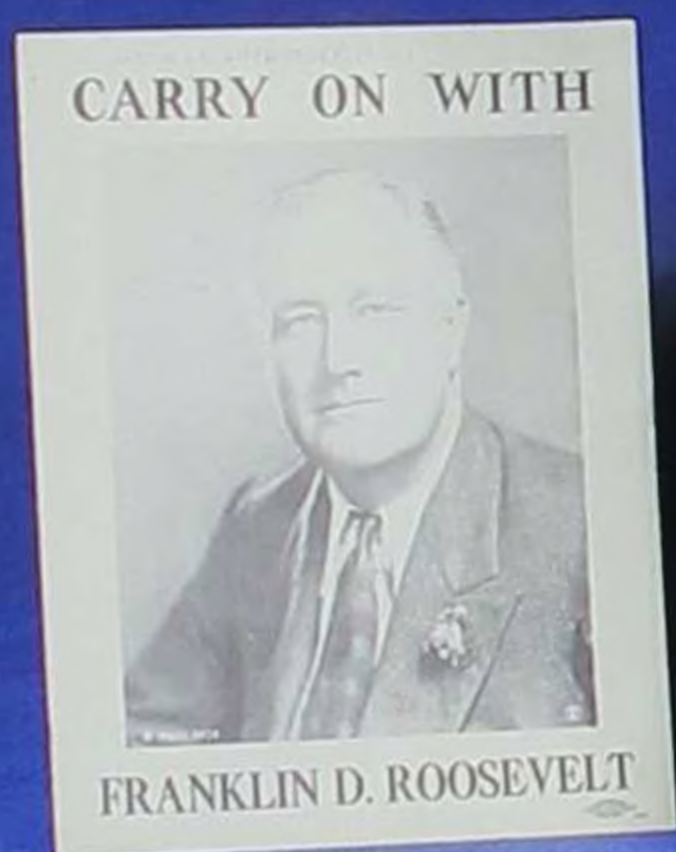
the federal monopoly on penny postcards (bottom left, 1908 postcard for Taft; right, for Bryan and 1908 running mate John W. Kern.) INSET: From 1928 campaigns, GOP needle packet urges women to "STICK to the Republican Party," and a thimble promises "Home, Happiness, Hoover." After the 1920 passage of woman suffrage, both parties geared up their appeals to women.

1932-1948: The Messages

INSET: Three campaign buttons propose economic remedies. Francis E. Townsend wanted pensions for Americans over sixty; Louisiana senator Huey Long would divide up the nation's wealth and guarantee families a \$2500 annual wage; the National Recovery Administration (NRA) was a New Deal program. As the blue poster suggests, in 1928 Al Smith's campaign had tried to woo Iowa farmers away from GOP candidate Herbert Hoover. By 1932, discontent fueled the resurgence of the

Democrats and election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt over Hoover. A 1940 pro-Wendell Willkie leaflet ("THINK!") likens FDR's unprecedented bid for a third term to European dictatorships. A well-formed ear of corn speaks for Roosevelt's supporters; a [Henry A.] Wallace And Roosevelt button — spelling WAR downward — speaks for his detractors.





The Medium

The radio became a campaign tool, especially for Roosevelt (shown on pamphlet), whose conversational style on the air replaced the strong oratory of whistle-stops and stump speeches. Battery-powered radios (like this Tatro radio made in Decorah) brought political speeches to farm families before rural electrification. Bumper stickers on automobiles were visual support for Republicans like Hoover and Democrats like Alf Landon of Kansas.

1952-1972: The Messages

Symbols of the Cold War and civil unrest loom over those of peace and prosperity. Beginning in the 1950s, Civil Defense signs posted on public buildings directed people to fallout shelters in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack. (This sign is from the old Historical Building in Des Moines.) In the 1960s and '70s, the protest symbol of a clenched fist called for student strikes and anti-war protests on U.S. campuses

(as did this one in May 1970 at the University of Iowa). INSET: 1950s slogans of peace and prosperity appear on Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower campaign sunglasses. A 1960s "Farmers for Kennedy" brochure links farm prosperity and world peace; Iowa governor Herschel Loveless is pictured on it with candidate John F. Kennedy.



SUNGLASSES COURTESY OF MAMIE DOUD EISENHOWER BIRTHPLACE, BOONE, IOWA



The Medium

Yard signs and television are campaign tools of recent decades. As Election Day approaches, homeowners tout their candidates by sticking cardboard signs in front yards; campaign organizers who supply the signs know that the busier the street, the more effective the sign. Far more sophisticated, television brings speeches, debates, and advertisements to millions. The first televised presidential campaign ad (in 1952 for Eisenhower) may have been

viewed on this 1949 Emerson table model. His campaign used the slogan "I Like Ike" on countless campaign buttons — and even on women's hosiery. This button with candidates' spouses Mamie Eisenhower and Pat Nixon was probably aimed at women voters. **INSETS:** Candidate Adlai Stevenson smiles from a star-studded cigarette pack (1956?), and a caricature of Lyndon Baines Johnson promotes the 1964 candidate from Texas.



Today: The Museum Exhibit

SPIRITED nineteenth- and twentieth-century campaign music will welcome you as you enter "Winnowing the Field: Candidates, Caucuses, and Presidential Campaigns in Iowa," the museum exhibit on which this photo essay is based. The State Historical Society of Iowa exhibit features hundreds more of the political and campaign artifacts from Iowa's campaigns since the mid-nineteenth century.

The history of Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucuses is also explored, with a look at each caucus from 1972 to 1988 and an explanation of the caucus process. The exhibit also tells the stories of seven Iowans who sought the presi-

dency, and highlights changes in campaign techniques and technology — from badges and buttons to sound bites of the television age.

"Winnowing the Field" will be at the State of Iowa Historical Building, 600 E. Locust, in Des Moines until June 6, 1993. Museum hours: 9-4:30 Tuesday-Saturday; 12-4:30 Sunday. Schedule group tours by calling (515) 242-5193.

For a free informative and illustrated brochure about the exhibit, contact the Iowa History Resource Center, State Historical Society of Iowa, 600 E. Locust, Des Moines, Iowa 50319. □