

In the Cabinet

“Because Captain Robert Lincoln escorted Miss Harlan,” wrote a reporter, “it was supposed that Senator Harlan is to go into the Cabinet.” Abraham Lincoln’s son married Mary Harlan, daughter of Senator James Harlan, but it was not on the strength of such a relationship that this able Iowan was appointed as Secretary of the Interior.

Senator Harlan had been a close friend and adviser of President Lincoln, even though criticising him severely at times. Lincoln recognized the Iowan’s integrity—a pillar of strength sorely needed in the administration at the close of the Civil War. Nominated on March 9, 1865, to be head of the Department of Interior, his appointment was confirmed by the Senate on the same day. But before Senator Harlan accepted the office, Lincoln was assassinated. President Johnson urged him to accept, however, and he entered upon his duties on May 15th.

Immediately Harlan began to turn out the “pack of thieves” then “preying” on the government. From that moment his tenure in the Cabinet was filled with “dire consequences”, for the “pack of thieves”, reinforced by a group of newspaper men whom he had deprived of sinecure clerkships, put their pens and presses to work. They did their best

to drive him from office by prejudicing the public against him. The papers charged him with keeping his son on the pay roll of his Department as a messenger; they accused him of profiting from the sale of Indian lands; and they even declared he used the coal of the Department in his private home.

The main cause of the "conspiracy" against Harlan is supposed to be his dismissal of Walt Whitman. Newspaper friends of Whitman assumed that Harlan dismissed him because of his writings. According to one version Harlan went to Whitman's desk one night, found there the manuscript of *Leaves of Grass*, and was so incensed by the immorality of it that he dismissed the poet. When Whitman's claims for reinstatement were urged by his friends, Harlan said he saw "no reason why the author of *Leaves of Grass* should be longer pensioned in a department devoted solely to business."

Harlan was putting his previously announced policy into effect. Investigation had shown that many government employees were drawing pay for practically no work. Whitman had been appointed to a clerkship because of his charitable work among the Civil War soldiers, and he was spending most of the time on his own poetry. Very likely Harlan did not approve of *Leaves of Grass*, for he was inclined to be puritanical in some respects, but Whitman's dismissal could be justified by other reasons.

The next Iowan to be Secretary of the Interior did not cause such a furor, but he accomplished as

much in another way. Samuel J. Kirkwood became Secretary of the Interior at about the time when the Indians were being removed from the plains. It was a difficult problem. Much good could be accomplished by education, thought Kirkwood. He was one of the first to advocate breaking up the tribal relations, believing the Indian lands should be allotted in severalty. Each one should have the rights and obligations of citizenship. This ambitious program might have been consummated, but President Garfield was assassinated and Arthur reorganized the Cabinet. Kirkwood was in office only a year.

Not only has Iowa furnished Secretaries for the Department of the Interior, but three Iowans have held the position of Secretary of Agriculture for twenty years — half of the time since the creation of the Department in 1889. The first Iowan to be Secretary of Agriculture, "Tama Jim" Wilson, was appointed in 1897 by President McKinley and continued to hold this position through the administrations of Roosevelt and Taft. His record of sixteen years of service has been unsurpassed by any other Cabinet member.

Tama Jim was well versed in agriculture as well as politics. He knew about farming from practical experience and had spent many years studying and teaching scientific methods. As Secretary of Agriculture he had the opportunity to inaugurate an extensive program which he had been formulating for almost half a century.

James Wilson tried "to help farmers to a better knowledge of production and its tendencies at home and abroad". He wished to do this "so as to enable them to intelligently meet the requirements of home and foreign markets for material that may be profitably grown or manufactured on American farms." Through agricultural colleges, experiment stations, and the aid of research scientists in his Department, he was enabled to accomplish his purpose.

As an illustration of the practical character of Wilson's achievements, when the American butter market became clogged he perfected methods of exporting butter—the first time it had ever been done. Many other new ideas did he vitalize. He started the daily weather service reports which were telegraphed far and wide and saved farmers thousands of dollars by giving them a chance to prepare for storms. He inaugurated chemical analyses of soils so that new grains adapted to peculiar local conditions could be introduced. Nor did he overlook the needs of the women, for whom he provided education in dietetics, cooking, and food values.

E. T. Meredith in 1920 and Henry C. Wallace during the years from 1921 to 1924 were confronted with entirely different agricultural problems. Hard times caused by inflated land values and falling prices of farm products demanded some national solution.

Secretary Meredith advocated coöperative marketing with the idea of carrying the surplus over to

periods of low production. His plan, which he thought much superior to the McNary-Haugen scheme, involved the purchase of farm commodities at various centers by a commission that would distribute them to foreign markets. Any loss that might be incurred would be paid from a general agricultural fund.

In contrast to this Democratic plan, Henry C. Wallace placed his confidence for farm relief in the McNary-Haugen bill. For his support of this plan he was berated and censured but characteristically he never wavered in his conviction. Supported by cattle raisers because "none of the big business interests could control him," Wallace justified this confidence in 1924 by opposing the Armour-Morris packing house merger.

It was because of Wallace's fearlessness of consequences and his tenacity that he kept the control of the national forest in the "department of conservation" rather than permitting it to fall into the hands of the "department of exploitation". For two years Albert B. Fall, Secretary of the Interior, tried to have the supervision of forestry transferred to his department. But he was "bitterly fought against by Secretary Wallace, although little concerning this struggle appeared in the papers. Wallace finally won, although for a time the issue seemed doubtful."

While James Wilson was Secretary of Agriculture, Iowa was distinguished by having another

member in Roosevelt's Cabinet. The career of Leslie M. Shaw as Secretary of the Treasury from 1902 to 1907 was distinguished by no momentous decisions or intricate financial problems. What reforms this Denison banker conceived were chiefly matters of detail. In the main he followed the even tenor of tradition.

The most memorable incident while Shaw was Secretary of the Treasury occurred on May 9, 1904, when he signed a treasury warrant for \$40,000,000 in payment to the New Panama Canal Company. This was the "largest single treasury warrant ever signed by any secretary of the treasury for financial purposes of the government, other than to transfer monies from one account to another in a purely clerical manner." The actual ceremony was "anything but a solemn affair", though it was regarded as an occasion long to be remembered.

Another cabinet position, held only once by an Iowan, is that of Postmaster General. Frank Hatton served in this capacity under President Arthur and, although he conducted the work of his department well, no remarkable achievements occurred during his régime.

Very different from Hatton's experience was the scandalous administration of General William W. Belknap while Secretary of War in the seventies. President Grant had selected Belknap on the basis of his popularity, his military record, and his reputation for being the "soul of honor".

Belknap was poor, his family was large, and his wife had social ambitions. In 1870 when Mrs. Belknap was visiting in the home of Caleb P. Marsh in New York she had suggested that he apply for an Indian trading-post and hinted that she would not refuse "a portion of the emoluments". Marsh obtained the post at Fort Sill which he immediately sub-let to John S. Evans, the acting trader for the past several years. For this privilege Evans paid to Marsh \$12,000 a year, quarterly, in advance. Marsh received the first payment in November, 1870, and sent half of it to Mrs. Belknap. All would have gone well, perhaps, but Mrs. Belknap died early in 1871. Instead of stopping the payments, Marsh forwarded them to the Secretary. In all he sent approximately \$20,000 to the Belknaps.

Secretary Belknap, who had had some warning of an investigation by the Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, anticipated the impending disaster. He therefore handed his resignation to the President on the morning of March 2, 1876. That afternoon the committee reported the discovery, "at the very threshold" of their investigations, of "such uncontradicted evidence of the malfeasance in office by General William W. Belknap, then Secretary of War", that they deemed it their duty "to lay the same before the House." The committee demanded unanimously that the Secretary be "dealt with according to the laws of the land".

The House started impeachment proceedings im-

mediately, but the case dragged along in the Senate for weeks and finally Belknap was acquitted on all articles charged against him because less than two-thirds of the Senate voted guilty. Of the sixty-two votes, only one person thought him entirely free from guilt. Twenty-three voted not guilty because they believed the Senate lacked jurisdiction after he had resigned.

Six years later Iowa was again trusted with the office of Secretary of War. George W. McCrary received his appointment from President Hayes. The presidential contest between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel J. Tilden had been settled in 1877 by action proposed by McCrary. He had introduced the resolution for a joint commission of fifteen to solve the contest between the two presidential candidates. The appointment was a token of political gratitude on the part of Hayes.

One of the most capable Iowans to hold a cabinet position was appointed in 1929 by President Hoover. James W. Good was selected as Secretary of War in recognition of his acknowledged ability as well as his activities as "pre-convention western manager" of the Hoover campaign. Secretary Good's untimely death in November, 1929, closed the career of a man who "would have been great enough to be President."

RAMONA EVANS