

On the Floor of the Senate

On Friday morning at half past eleven, December 18, 1846, the members of the Senate, preceded by their president, filed into the crowded hall of the House of Representatives in the south end of the Old Stone Capitol at Iowa City. After nearly three weeks of partisan jockeying for advantage, the General Assembly was meeting in joint convention for the election of United States Senators in anticipation of the admission of Iowa into the Union. The capital was the scene of unusual animation. Politicians and newspaper editors thronged the streets and hotel lobbies, while hopeful candidates awaited the decision in eager uncertainty.

Within the legislative chamber deep silence reigned as the secretary began to call the roll of members. C. Anderson voted for Jonathan McCarty, the Whig candidate, but the tally was immediately balanced when J. R. Bailey expressed his choice of Thomas S. Wilson, the Democratic aspirant for a seat in the national Senate. So the roll proceeded. Each member voted in strict allegiance to the decision of his party caucus until the ballot stood McCarty eight and Wilson ten. Then, to the consternation of the Whigs, Samuel Fullenwider cast his vote for G. C. R. Mitchell. Could the Whigs muster the thirty votes required to elect McCarty?

Hope flickered; but flared up again when Jacob Huner sided with the McCarty contingent. As soon as the last name was called the result was known: McCarty, twenty-nine; Wilson, twenty-eight; Mitchell, one — no election!

The excitement which had been suppressed during the balloting burst all bounds. Immediately a Democrat moved to adjourn. If a second ballot were taken, Fullenwider might vote for McCarty and enable the Whigs to carry the election, but if the election could be postponed time and chance might intervene to shift the balance of power. Again and again the motion to adjourn was defeated, until at last two independent members supported a compromise to adjourn until January 5th. But when the appointed time arrived the Democratic Senate refused to assemble in joint convention. As day after day passed even the most optimistic lost hope of electing United States Senators. The House, being Whig, proposed various expedients but the Senate steadfastly refused to concur. Finally, on February 25, 1847, with the adjournment of the First General Assembly, the curtain fell on the first act in this dramatic contest over the election of the first United States Senators from Iowa.

A special session of the General Assembly in January, 1848, called for the express purpose of electing Senators, was no more successful than the regular session had been. The deadlock between the two houses still existed and for a second time partisan

politics and personal jealousy deprived the State of representation in the national Senate. But the political complexion of the Second General Assembly was different. The Democrats had a majority in each house. At the joint convention of the legislature on December 7, 1848, Augustus Caesar Dodge and George Wallace Jones were promptly elected by votes of thirty-eight to nineteen.

Slow to claim her allotted seats in the United States Senate, Iowa has likewise been reluctant to change the personnel of her representation there. The list of Senators from Iowa is not long — only nineteen names in all. Men who have been tried and found true have been elected and reëlected. The seat which fell to the lot of Senator Dodge had only five incumbents in eighty years — A. C. Dodge, James Harlan, Samuel J. Kirkwood, William B. Allison, and Albert B. Cummins. That is the seat now held by Smith W. Brookhart.

Augustus Caesar Dodge, as his name implies, had something of the Roman in him. His vision of an ever expanding national domain never dimmed: there must be plenty of room for a growing population. Earlier in his career he had been Register of the United States Land Office. As Delegate to Congress from the Territory of Iowa, he had been instrumental in securing the admission of Iowa into the Union. In the Senate he exerted himself in behalf of a homestead bill to provide homes for the landless — a subject most dear to his heart. The

admission of California he favored though deploring the slavery issue it raised. From the Court of Madrid, he returned in 1859 without being able to acquire Cuba for the United States, but, thanks to Her Catholic Majesty, Queen Isabella, with the "most agreeable recollections of Spain".

The voice of Senator Dodge on the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Bill bespoke the spirit of democracy. Belief in the sovereignty of the people was the strain that ran through his views on the restriction of Slavery. "We are Democrats", he said, "and believe that the people of the territories are capable of self-government, and will take care of themselves, without conditions or restrictions being fastened upon them by Congress."

As a pioneer by birth and inclination Dodge, and his colleague, George Wallace Jones, did much to further the interests of the settlers. Their efforts to obtain land grants to aid in the construction of railroads were particularly effective. Dodge perhaps had more mental vigor than Jones, but the latter exhibited much tact and personal address, which were often greater factors in winning the legislation he desired than sheer intellect.

Jones was a striking figure in whatever capacity he stood. Farmer, lead miner and smelter, judge, soldier, land speculator, politician, and diplomat, his career was as picturesque as it was varied. Particularly successful was he in social affairs. A Lord Chesterfield to the end of his life, he recalled his

love for dress even as a boy. "I remember that when I was a student at Transylvania University I was fastidious in the matter of dress." Indeed, "I used to beg my laundress to starch my collars so stiff that they could draw blood from my ears".

One of the most prominent characteristics of Senator Jones was his persistence. Though he lost many friends and gained many enemies, though he was harshly criticized in newspapers (and for Jones, a man of distinctly social tendencies and love of popularity, this was no small price to pay for the things he cherished), he could usually find gratification in the consummation of his purpose. Again and again, bills for railroad land grants for Iowa were in danger of being submerged, but eventually, due chiefly to the efforts of Senator Jones, a measure was passed providing for four lines of railroad connecting the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

In appearance James W. Grimes, who succeeded Jones in the Senate, was tall and commanding, possessed of an unstudied grace of movement. A certain sternness of expression was an indication of his judicial nature — he weighed facts carefully, formed his opinions on the basis of justice, and then clung to them with unswerving tenacity. His keen insight, his courage of action, and his natural tact contributed largely to his achievements in statecraft. Elected Governor of Iowa as a Whig in 1854, he became one of the organizers of the Republican party. Under his brilliant leadership, the new party at-

tained the ascendancy in Iowa politics, so that his election to the Senate was a natural consequence. Grimes was the first Iowa Governor to "round out" his career in the United States Senate. It has been a common aspiration, accomplished by only four — Grimes, Kirkwood, Gear, and Cummins.

The crowning act in the life of Senator Grimes was perfectly characteristic of his integrity and courage. In the lives of statesmen there are few more admirable records than his in the impeachment trial of President Johnson. And yet by that decision he wrecked his own political career and brought upon himself the wrath and calumny of the party he had helped to form. It was one of the most ironical turns of fortune in Iowa history.

Convinced that the President, if acquitted, would do nothing in violation of the Constitution, Senator Grimes decided to oppose his removal from office. His decision converted others, and the betting odds on acquittal were even. At last, after months of disgraceful conspiracy and intimidation, the day for the judgment dawned. In the Senate chamber a fateful hush prevailed, even in the crowded galleries. At the managers' table sat John A. Logan, Thaddeus Stevens, and Charles Sumner. Just before the roll began, Senator Grimes, desperately ill, was borne in by four men, his pale face twisted with pain.

And now the roll call on the eleventh article. That failing, all would be lost.

Anthony: "Guilty."

As the call proceeded, the faces of members were pallid, some sick with fear.

Fessenden: "Not guilty." A deathlike stillness with the calling of each name, and then a heavy breathing.

Fowler: "Not guilty." Hope of conviction was failing.

Frelinghuysen: "Guilty."

Grimes: "Not guilty." His voice was clear and distinct.

Harlan: "Guilty." But the vote of the senior Senator from Iowa was of no avail except in popularity at home. The battle to save the dignity and honor of the nation was won by the staunch Republicans who could not be coerced by popular clamor. Senator Grimes counted it the "proudest act of his life", though one of his most bitter experiences.

The senatorial career of Samuel J. Kirkwood was not marked by spectacular achievements. He never was spectacular. Rather as a man, as a thinker of sound judgment, as a doer in promoting public welfare he finds distinction among figures of national importance. Quiet and unpretentious, he was nevertheless outspoken and emphatic on occasion.

During his first short term in 1867, he came in conflict with Charles Sumner in the debate on the admission of Nebraska to the Union. Sumner referred to the Nebraska constitution as being odious because it contained the word "white". The same

objectionable word still remained in the constitution of Iowa and Senator Kirkwood warned Sumner to be careful of the terms he applied to the State constitutions that did not correspond to the Massachusetts model.

“May I ask the Senator if he considers that provision in the constitution of Iowa right or wrong?” inquired Sumner.

“I conceive it to be the business of the people of Iowa and not the business of the Senator from Massachusetts”, retorted Kirkwood.

In some respects, Kirkwood was a poor politician. He hated surreptitious scheming and connivance almost as much as open corruption. During his candidacy for the Senate in 1877, some of his friends proposed the publication of a private letter derogatory to James Harlan, his principal rival for the Republican nomination. But Kirkwood would not permit it. If he could not win on his own merits he did not want to be elected.

James Harlan, Senator from 1855 to 1865 and again from 1867 to 1873, was influential in whatever field he moved — and the fields of his interest were many. Principal of Iowa City College in 1846, he became the first State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1847, and the president of Iowa Wesleyan College in 1853. Two years later he found himself United States Senator in Washington, and within another decade a member of President Lincoln's Cabinet.

Senator Harlan's attitude on the slavery question was well considered and decisive. There was no phase of the question he did not examine. In his own opinion he exerted more influence in behalf of freedom than on any other subject. Forceful and convincing, his speeches went direct to fundamentals. In the interest of government bounties for railroads he worked hard. He exposed the injuries inflicted upon the Indians. As an Iowan he became "one of the leading advocates of every prudent measure calculated to develop agriculture."

His defense of the Santo Domingo policy of President Grant was particularly effective. "While Mr. Harlan was speaking, the crowd of congressmen and others pressed forward until General Sherman, his eagle eye flashing, stood but a yard away from Mr. Harlan, watching him intently. The moment it was over, Old Tecumseh, bouncing upstairs and into the President's room shouted: 'Grant, Harlan's done it! He knocked them this way, and he knocked them that way!'"

Harlan was defeated for reelection in 1872 by William B. Allison, the man who was even then well on his way toward the long distance record of service as representative of Iowa in Congress. Born two days before John Quincy Adams quitted the Executive Mansion, he lived to see William Howard Taft run for the Presidency. For nearly forty-three years he was a familiar figure in the national capital. Beginning as a Representative of the Third

Congressional District in 1863, he participated in the post-war legislation. Nor did he escape the hate that mars the record of that period. He made a bitter speech in favor of confiscating the property of the rebels, he supported the radical reconstruction measures, and he was active in impeaching President Johnson.

During his six consecutive terms in the United States Senate he studied many public problems and weathered many changes in popular opinion. But so wisely did he diagnose the political ailments that, whether he yielded or resisted, his reputation for sound judgment steadily rose. He directed the course of his career so skilfully that he numbered among his friends both Garfield and Conkling, Dooliver and Aldrich. The man who was not shocked by the vicious railroad lobbying in the sixties enjoyed the confidence of President Roosevelt in 1906.

As chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs he helped to inaugurate the policy of more generous educational facilities and the legal establishment of private property among the Indians. But it was in the realm of public finance that he was most conspicuous. For a quarter of a century he was chairman of the Committee on Appropriations. His name is associated with a currency act that prevented free coinage at a time when European countries were ready to dispose of their silver. Three Presidents wanted him to be Secretary of the Treasury.

William B. Allison's work was intricate, prosaic, and arduous. Close attention to the details of tariff bills, the explanation of salary increases in minor offices, the justification of a new post office in Dubuque — these activities do not excite the imagination. Yet the importance of this kind of service can not be overestimated.

Accompanied by George G. Wright when he took the oath of office, Allison himself led five Iowans to the bar of the Senate to pledge their faithful support to the constitution and laws of the United States — Samuel J. Kirkwood, James W. McDill, James F. Wilson, John H. Gear, and Jonathan P. Dolliver. The eloquent young Dolliver contrasted strikingly with the quiet senior Senator from Iowa. At times of relaxation there appeared to be an air of laziness about Dolliver, but when standing on the floor of the Senate with all his faculties alert his whole physical presence was dynamic, powerful, tremendously effective.

Dolliver's fame as an orator was wide-spread. He contended that his power of persuasion emanated from his ability to voice the thought of the common people. A master in the use of the epigram, he was able to clarify abstract principles by the use of striking similes and metaphors derived from the things of everyday life. Witty, emotional, idealistic, Dolliver was none the less a thorough student of public problems. When he decided to declare his political independence of the conservative

wing of the Republican party and attack the wool and cotton schedules in the Payne-Aldrich tariff bill, he amassed all of the information possible, even employing experts to instruct him concerning the manufactures of these products, before he took the floor to turn the artillery of his sarcasm and eloquence upon the works of the high protectionists. Dolliver was one of the few Congressmen who could command absolute silence while he spoke. His readiness of tongue, his vivid language, his smooth diction, and his masterful presence were the instruments of the true orator.

When Albert B. Cummins announced his gubernatorial candidacy in 1901, it was because he hoped that it would eventually lead him to the United States Senate, whereon he had set his heart as early as 1893. And because, after his second term, the opening for him in the Senate was not yet clear, he continued to occupy the office of Governor for a third term.

Through the efforts of Governor Cummins, the movement toward popular nomination of public officers, including United States Senators, came to a head in 1907 when the primary election law was enacted. The senatorial contest between Allison and Cummins was the first to be affected by this new law. Senator Allison won the victory in the June primaries, but his death two months later left the seat vacant. Governor Cummins called a special session of the General Assembly, and, after his res-

ignation from the office of Governor, he was free to accept the Senatorship.

In the course of time, Senator Cummins became chairman of the Committee on Interstate Commerce. So it came to pass that he assumed the leadership in framing a bill by which the railroads, after being operated for twenty-six months by the government as a war measure, were returned to their owners. The Transportation Act of 1920 is one of the most important pieces of national legislation in recent years. Cummins was also chairman of the Judiciary Committee and in 1919 he was elected president pro tempore of the Senate, a position he continued to hold until 1925. From the time that Vice President Coolidge assumed the duties of President on August 3, 1923, until Charles G. Dawes was inaugurated on March 4, 1925, Senator Cummins performed the duties of Vice President of the United States.

His distinguished record closed in 1926, when Senator Smith W. Brookhart won the Republican nomination for United States Senator in the primary election. As the direct primary, favorite political device of Governor Cummins, failed to secure his first senatorial nomination, so the same instrument served to accomplish his defeat after eighteen years of conspicuous leadership in the upper house of the national legislature.

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