

The Palimpsest

VOLUME 57 NUMBER 5

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 1976



Disgraced Iowan William Belknap Takes Leave of Pres. Grant

IOWA STATE HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT
DIVISION OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRICE—Free to members. Single Issue \$1.00
MEMBERSHIP—By application. Annual dues—\$5.00
LIFE MEMBERSHIP—\$150
HUSBAND AND WIFE JOINT LIFE MEMBERSHIP—\$200
ADDRESS INQUIRIES TO: State Historical Society,
402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240
USISSN 0031—0360

THE PALIMPSEST is published bi-monthly by the State Historical Society in Iowa City. It is printed in Cedar Rapids and distributed free to Society members, depositories, and exchanges. This is the September/October 1976 issue and is Number 5 of Volume 57. Second Class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa and at additional mailing offices.

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Division of the State Historical Society, 1976
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Cover: *This dramatic scene (an artist's imaginative view of a private event) shows Secy. of War William Belknap after handing his hasty resignation to Pres. Ulysses S. Grant. For the story see p. 130. (From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 18, 1876, courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Iconographic Collections)*



The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

The Fall of an Iowa Hero

by
L. Edward Purcell

The astounding news struck Iowa, one local newspaper said, "like a bolt of lightning from a cloudless sky." William Worth Belknap, a resident of Keokuk, a war-hero, and a member of President Ulysses S. Grant's Cabinet, had been accused of corruption and charged with taking bribes. The tall, handsome, blond-haired, blue-eyed Secretary of War was a popular hero to most Iowans. They knew only of his brilliant career and a spotless record until Rep. Hiestor Clymer brought his damning accusations against the Iowan on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives March 2, 1876. Perhaps the worst news for Belknap's Iowa friends was the report that "the Secretary has not denied the charge." The sordid and pathetic tale of Belknap's malfeasance was the most dramatic scandal of Grant's second term in office, an administration known even then for its venality and corruption.

Belknap was not a native son of Iowa. Born in New York to Ann Clark Belknap and General William G. Belknap (a regular Army officer) in 1829, he graduated from Princeton in 1848 and studied law at Georgetown where he was admitted to the bar in 1851. Later that year, young

Belknap moved to Keokuk, a bustling Iowa town on the Mississippi.

There he entered law practice with Ralph P. Lowe, a future Governor of Iowa and Justice of the State Supreme Court. The legal partnership, dealing extensively in real estate, prospered. In 1857, his fellow citizens elected Belknap, a "Douglas" Democrat, to the Iowa General Assembly, the first legislative session to meet at the new state capital in Des Moines. The popular and congenial Belknap, along with his wife Cora Leroy Belknap, was a prominent member of local society.

At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Belknap — a leader of the Keokuk militia — received a commission as major of the Fifteenth Iowa Infantry. In rapid succession during the first two years of the War, Belknap advanced in rank. He was a colonel by April 1863; at the battle of Shiloh he was cited for bravery when his horse was shot out from under him; and while leading his men at Corinth, he caught the attention of his superiors, who elevated him to a position on the general staff. Then, on July 22, 1864, during fighting at Atlanta, he clinched his military reputation with an act of personal heroism. In the heat

of the battle he reached across the breastwork, seized a Confederate major by the coat, and pulled the enemy bodily into the Union fortification. Six days later, Belknap was promoted to brigadier general and placed in command of the famous Crocker's Brigade, made up of four Iowa regiments.

Belknap's army career ended in glory. He fought with Sherman on the "March to the Sea" and was at the final battle of the War at Bentonville, North Carolina. Following the Grand Review of the Union Army in Washington, D.C., Belknap was brevetted to the rank of major general and offered a regular commission in the post-war Army.

He refused the field officer's commission, however, mustered out of the Army, and returned to Keokuk. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed Collector of the Internal Revenue for the Iowa First District. By all accounts, he performed his office well, collecting and recording large sums of money without a single discrepancy. Belknap's first wife died during the War, and in 1868, he remarried. The new bride was a young Kentucky girl—Carita Tomlinson.

Belknap's public career reached its zenith in 1869 when President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Belknap to the post of Secretary of War on the recommendation of Belknap's old commander, Gen. William T. Sherman. Belknap assumed office with a pious declaration: "Honored as I have been by the President with a position conferred upon me without solicitation, it will be my en-



Belknap in the mid-1870s, about the time of his impeachment. (courtesy Division of Historical Museum and Archives)

deavor, with the enforcement of rigid economy, so to conduct its affairs as to command the approval of the country, relying on that patriotism which has ever guided the American people"

Supervising the War Department was an important and complicated task. Perhaps the most perplexing problem facing the Secretary of War was the administration of the Army posts along the Indian frontier. The western posts had long been a source of anxiety and embarrassment to the government. Before 1867, the posts were served by sutlers—combination traders and storekeepers—but the old system had been abolished following the War. At the time of Belknap's appointment, Congress passed a



Amanda "Puss" Belknap (courtesy the Division of Historical Museum and Archives)

new law giving the Secretary of War complete personal control over post traderships. Whoever got these positions stood to make generous profits from both the troops and the Indians trading at the posts. The new law made traderships a part of the political patronage system, a lucrative bauble at the disposal of the administration.

Belknap's own political allegiance had changed during the War. He cast his first Republican vote while serving in the field, and on his return to civilian life, he became active in G.O.P. party politics. The Republicans were, of course, politically supreme following the War, and nowhere more powerful than in Iowa, where the party dominated public office for decades. Belknap's war record, his friendship with party stalwarts, and his own engaging personality, made him prominent in G.O.P. circles. His strong

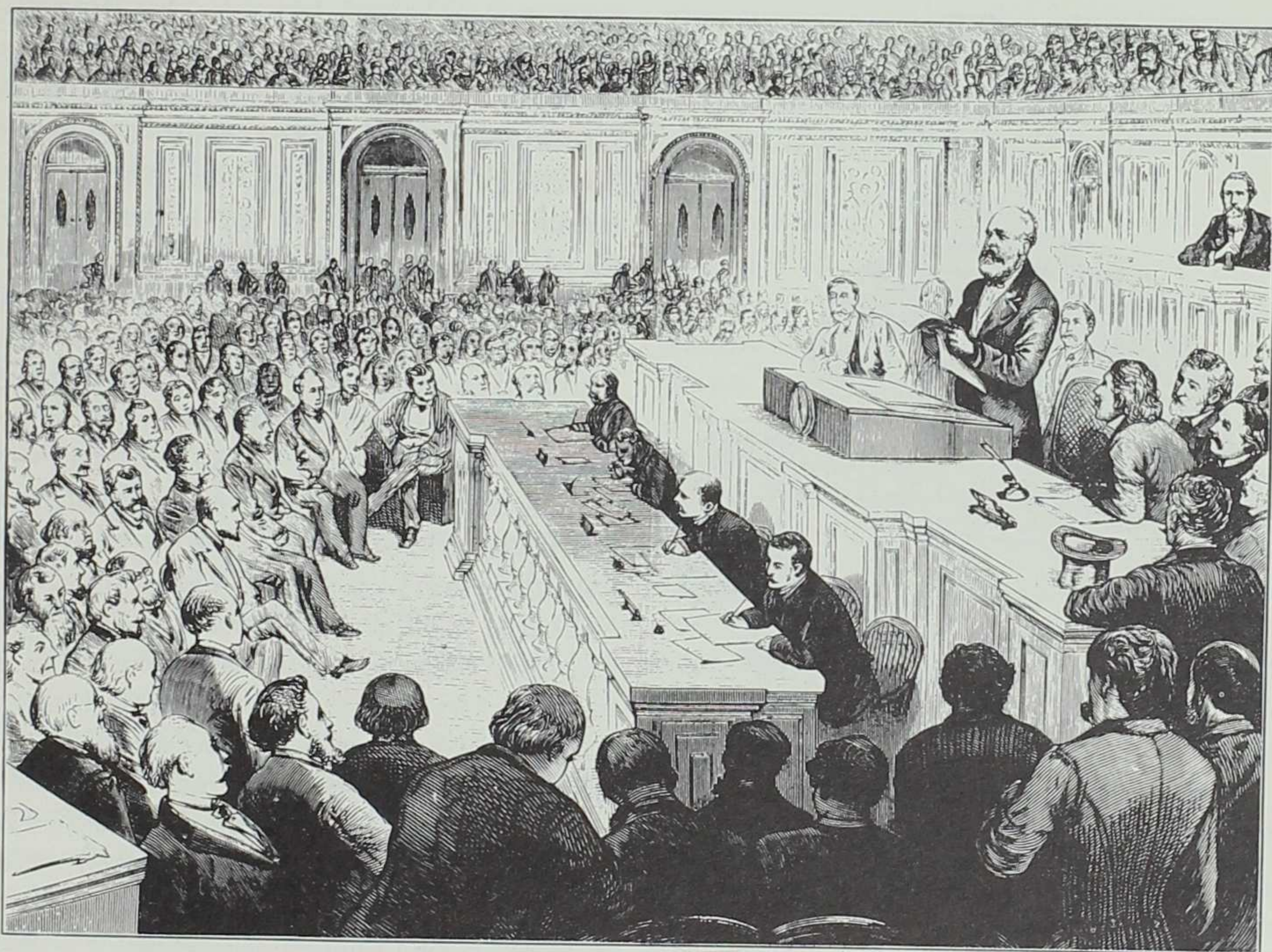
support of the party undoubtedly helped influence Grant's decision to appoint him Secretary of War.

Belknap and Carita set up housekeeping in a fashionable home in Washington, where they entertained on a grand scale. The sumptuous furnishings of the house, including imported carpets, expensive furniture, and the finest crystal and china, provided the setting for lavish dinner parties. The Belknaps were among the foremost Washington socialites, treating their guests with good food and the best vintages.

Carita's health, however, was fragile. Shortly after the birth of her son Robert, she began to decline. A few days after Christmas 1870, she died. Carita's sister, Amanda (known to everyone in Washington as "Puss") assumed care of the infant, but five months later, the child, too, succumbed. In 1873, two years after this third tragedy in his personal life, Belknap married Puss, herself a recent widow.

Puss Belknap was well prepared to take up the social whirl. She was, according to a contemporary description, a "tall, shapely, handsome, brilliant brunette, with fresh complexion and graceful carriage, vivaciously trying her repartee on her companions." Mrs. Belknap was not an empty-headed beauty. Just how complicated, or even devious, she was soon became the focus of national attention.

On March 2, 1876, Hiester Clymer, a Democrat from Pennsylvania and ironically Belknap's roommate in college, strode onto the floor of the House and interrupted debate. As chairman of the House Committee on Expenditures



Hiester Clymer, Chairman of the House Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, addressing the House on the malfeasance of Secy. Belknap. (From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 18, 1876, courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Iconographic Collections)

in the War Department, he had been conducting hearings on post traderships. He announced to the legislators that his committee discovered "on the very threshold of their investigation such unquestioned evidence of the malfeasance in office by General William W. Belknap, then Secretary of War, that they find it to be their duty to lay the same before the House."

Clymer continued, "They further report that this day at eleven o'clock a.m. a letter of the President of the United States was presented to the committee accepting the resignation of the Secretary of War, which is hereto attached, together with a copy of his letter of

resignation, which the President informs the committee, was accepted about ten o'clock and twenty minutes this morning."

Before the stunned Iowa House delegation could delay proceedings (John Kasson pleaded for time to absorb the shocking revelations), Clymer moved that Belknap be impeached. The Committee chairman then read the damaging testimony.

The story was complicated. Even at the perspective of a hundred years it is difficult to sort out exactly what happened and who was to blame. The first hint of irregularity in regard to post traderships had come four years earlier



William W. Belknap during the War. (courtesy the Division of Historical Museum and Archives)

in a story in the *New York Herald*, describing the relationship between John Evans, the post trader at Fort Sill, Indian Territory, and a New York businessman, Caleb P. Marsh, who officially held the trader's appointment. The story was almost ignored at the time, and the alleged irregularity was forgotten until the tradership came under the scrutiny of Clymer's committee.

The House Committee on Expenditures, dominated by Democrats who were in control of the House after a slight weakening of Republican national strength, met on February 29, 1876. Democrats Joseph Blackburn of Kentucky and William Robbins of North Carolina joined Clymer, the Democratic chairman; the two Republican members were Lyman Bass of New York and Lorenzo Danford of Ohio.

It was probably true, as many Republicans claimed, that the committee

(and several others like it) aimed to embarrass the Grant administration before the general election in November. The Democrats need scarcely to have bothered — Grant did well enough at embarrassing himself. His second presidential term was so riddled with scandals they overlapped one another. Only a few days before the revelations about Belknap, a trial had ended implicating Grant's private secretary Orville E. Babcock in the "Whiskey Ring," an attempt to use official influence to evade taxes on liquor and split the profits with the manufacturers. Grant's Vice-President Schuyler Colfax had been involved in scandal and so had the President's brother, Orvil Lynch Grant. In fact, only recently has Grant's second administration been replaced as the most scandal-ridden and corrupt in American history. The Democrats, hoping to break the G.O.P.'s hold on national office, wanted to make corruption in Washington a major campaign issue in 1876.

Meeting with only the Democrats present, Clymer's Committee called Caleb Marsh to testify. He told a fascinating story. In 1870, Belknap and his second wife Carita visited Marsh's home while vacationing in New York. Carita became seriously ill during the visit and remained in the care of Marsh and his wife while her husband returned to his official duties in Washington. Marsh reported that Carita evidently felt some obligation for their kindness. She drew Marsh aside one day and suggested he apply for a post tradership on the frontier, adding that such posts were light work and very profitable.

Marsh claimed to be surprised by her suggestion and said he understood traderships usually went to disabled sol-

diers. Carita assured him that the posts were in the gift of the Secretary of War and often were awarded to political favorites. She told Marsh she could secure the post for him through her influence with her husband, but she cautioned him not to mention "presents" to the Secretary in regard to the appointment because he was sensitive about such matters.

Within a few weeks Marsh heard again from Carita. She said the post at Ft. Sill was open and he should apply. Marsh went to Washington for an interview with Belknap. The Secretary told Marsh he could have the appointment if proper references were available, although the current post trader, John Evans, was in Washington seeking re-appointment. Belknap suggested Marsh try for an accommodation with Evans. Marsh discussed the post with Evans, and they made a bargain. Marsh was to have the official appointment, but Evans would continue to act at Ft. Sill, supplying the post and collecting the income. In return, Evans signed a contract with Marsh for a yearly payment of \$15,000 (later reduced to \$12,000) for the privilege of remaining as trader. The deal was not, apparently, unusual. Official cronies often secured lucrative appointments through political influence, then "farmed" out the work and collected profits without actually taking on any duties.

The following November, Evans made the first installment of his yearly payments to Marsh. Then Marsh took the fatal step. He sent half the money to Carita. She certainly must have known the money was an out-and-out bribe, and one she had solicited in return for her influence with Belknap. Whether or not Belknap knew of the payment became a

vital question — but the Secretary never admitted knowledge of the arrangement between Marsh and Carita, and no conclusive evidence to the contrary ever came to light.

Carita died within a few weeks, and the plot grew considerably more complicated. When Marsh came to Washington to attend Carita's funeral, he was drawn aside by her sister Puss, then a widow caring for Belknap's infant son. Puss artlessly informed Marsh she knew about the money "due" Carita and said it would go now to the child in her care. When Marsh agreed to continue payments, Puss suggested the money be paid directly to Secretary Belknap. From 1871 until 1876, Marsh gave Belknap more than \$20,000, all of it from Evans' pay-off money. Marsh testified that he did not discuss the source of the funds with the Secretary, even after Puss became the third Mrs. Belknap in 1873. The money came to Belknap personally,



Hiester Clymer, Belknap's political nemesis and former room-mate. (From Leslie's, March 18, 1876, courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Iconographic Collections)

in cash or as certificates on the National Bank of America, and he signed receipts for most of it.

Under the Committee's cross-examination, Marsh recalled that he and Belknap had discussed the post tradership only once, four years before, when the *New York Herald* story in 1872 revealed Marsh's relationship to Evans. At that time, Belknap asked Marsh if he had dealings with Evans. Marsh said he had a formal contract, and the subject was dropped.

At no time did Marsh admit talking to Belknap about the source of the payments. Belknap supporters later claimed the Secretary believed the money to come from private investments Puss retained from her previous marriage. The theory was Belknap thought Marsh handled Puss's money and assumed the regular cash payments were only a private business affair.

When Marsh received the subpoena of the committee on February 23, he went immediately to Belknap. At first the Secretary said he did not mind if Marsh testified since there was little to damage him. Marsh then revealed to Belknap the source of the money and the history of the pay-off arrangement. At this point Puss attempted to influence the course of the investigation. She dispatched her brother Dr. William Tomlinson to speak with committee member Joseph Blackburn, a friend and fellow Kentuckian. Tomlinson tried to arrange for the committee to go easy on Belknap if Marsh would implicate only Carita and Puss. Tomlinson met with Blackburn several times and kept in close touch with Marsh who was thinking of fleeing the country. Tomlinson urged Marsh to testify before the committee, but to

keep silent about Belknap's knowledge of the bribes.

Marsh did exactly as Tomlinson requested. Throughout his testimony both before the committee and later at the impeachment trial, Marsh refused to alter his story — even though he freely admitted that Tomlinson had arranged for him *not* to implicate Belknap. Only Marsh, Belknap, and Belknap's wives knew for certain the true extent of the Secretary's knowledge. No one ever questioned or denied that an illegal pay-off existed after Marsh had testified before the committee on February 29, but none of the principals ever admitted that Belknap was party to the bribe. It is possible that he did not know the large sums passing through his hands were illegal graft, but if he failed to question the source of the money (the total equalling nearly two and one half times his annual salary), then he was either extremely trusting or not very curious.

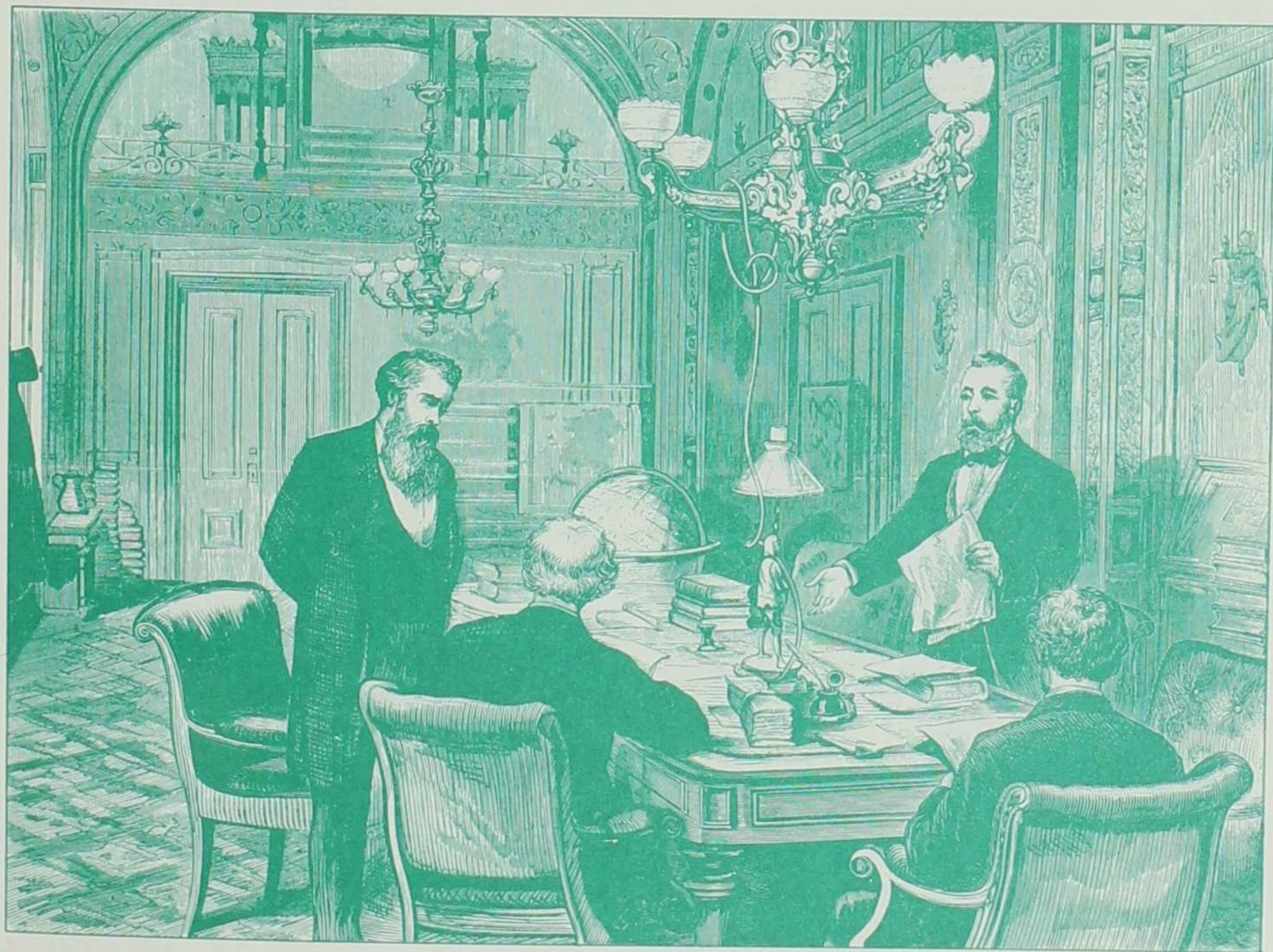
On March 1, the day following Marsh's private testimony to the Democratic members, the full committee met with Marsh and Belknap. Clymer had the text of Marsh's account read to the Secretary. Representative Blackburn then confessed he had met privately with Puss and her brother Dr. Tomlinson. Blackburn had given them assurances that, if Marsh would not name Belknap directly, the Secretary would be allowed off the hook and no charges would be brought against him. Puss and Carita were to take the blame. Belknap requested counsel, and the committee adjourned until afternoon. At 3:00, Belknap re-appeared with his lawyer Montgomery Blair, who heard the testimony read again. Belknap left the meeting while Blair attempted to work out a deal with the committee. According to an account of the meeting

published in the *Chicago Tribune*, Blair got the committee to drop the names of Carita, her child, and Puss from the charges, on the condition that Belknap would admit taking the money from Marsh (a reversal of Tomlinson's "deal"). Clymer also insisted Belknap resign immediately. Blair agreed and left the meeting with the understanding that if Belknap resigned and admitted guilt for the bribes, then the investigation would be dropped.

This bargain between Belknap and the committee is one plausible explanation of Belknap's subsequent resignation — although his foes at the time and historians since have put another construction on his rather hasty action. The

events of the following day made any bargain irrelevant, and none of the principals ever mentioned it. The unsubstantiated newspaper account is the only source for the story — Clymer and Blackburn were unlikely to admit making such a deal after the fact.

President Ulysses S. Grant was due, on the morning of March 2, for a portrait sitting with artist Henry Ulke. Shortly after breakfast, however, Secretary of War Belknap surprised the President with a visit. The Cabinet member, red-eyed and disheveled, handed Grant a curt letter of resignation and spoke of dishonor to himself and his wives. The resignation bewildered



Belknap meets with the Committee. (From Leslie's, March 18, 1876, courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Iconographic Collections)



Puss pleads with Rep. Blackburn for mercy.

Grant, never the quickest-witted of men, who at once wrote an acceptance which he handed to Belknap at 10:20. The former Secretary left, and Grant proceeded with his daily affairs.

Grant's instant acceptance of the resignation created much controversy. According to Secretary of the Treasury Hamilton Fish, Grant told his Cabinet the next day that he had failed to realize the gravity of Belknap's urgent request. Julia Dent Grant, the President's wife, wrote in her memoirs that Grant received a warning to delay the resignation only minutes after Belknap's de-

parture. The important point was that by accepting the resignation Grant removed Belknap from office just hours before Clymer brought resolutions of impeachment before the House of Representatives, creating a difficult problem of Congressional jurisdiction.

When Clymer read the testimony of Marsh to the House, Belknap was already a private citizen. During the brief debate following the charges, committee member William Robbins pointed out that Congress probably had no jurisdiction over a private citizen. Other members argued, however, that im-

peachment was a process of disbarment from office as well as removal, so the action should proceed. Despite Iowa Representative John Kasson's plea for delay, the House voted unanimously to adopt resolutions of impeachment. The Speaker of the House appointed the Committee on Expenditures in the War Department as a special body to inform the Senate pending the drafting of articles of impeachment by the House Judiciary Committee.

John Kasson was not alone in his shock and dismay. The people of Iowa — or at least the newspapers of Iowa — were equally stunned. In Keokuk the *Daily Gate City*, a Republican paper, carried the full details of Clymer's revelations the following day, March 3. Bold headlines proclaimed the charges, Marsh's testimony, and Belknap's resignation. The editor had little to add to the account, except his statement that even though Belknap appeared to be guilty — especially in light of his hasty resignation — it would be best for Iowans to await the full story.

Belknap's war record and his service to the state were so exemplary the emotional reaction of most Iowans must have been one of profound sorrow. Even though he had only recently been defeated in the Iowa Senatorial election, finishing well behind victor Samuel Kirkwood, he was still a popular figure in the state. At one time, it had been proposed that a county be named after Belknap. Pottawattamie County, Iowa's largest, was to be split in two, and one of the halves re-named "Belknap"; however, the voters of the county failed to ratify the move and were spared the embarrassment of living in a county named for an impeached Cabinet member.

The *Davenport Gazette* sounded the dominant reaction of the state:

The allegations affecting the official integrity of the Secretary will be everywhere received with great surprise by the numerous friends of the gentleman. By none, denial and refutation of the essential facts of those charges can be more ardently desired, or more anxiously awaited, than by the fellow citizens of Gen. Belknap here in Iowa. Should their general correctness remain unchallenged, and their truthfulness be established, the citizens of Iowa, more than those of any other part of the Union will be deeply mortified, and will be moved to the most profound regret.

Even the Democratic papers in the state were circumspect at first about denouncing the Secretary. However, as the early reports were confirmed, the partisan editors took up their cudgels and began to beat the G.O.P. in the person of Belknap. Soon papers such as the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, the *Chariton Patriot*, and the *Keokuk Daily Constitution* made political points from the scandal.

The *Hawk-Eye* said, "It is shocking, scandalous, terrible. No nation in the world . . . has been burdened with such a shame." The *Keokuk Daily Constitution* served a heavy dose of criticism, yet mixed in a measure of wistfulness since Belknap was a local man. In a long article the editor reported a sampling of reactions taken from Belknap's hometown friends and acquaintances: "We started on a tour this morning for the purpose of ascertaining the sentiment of both friends and foes of Belknap's, and among the former, we found the universal opinion to be that General Belknap's skirts were clear; that through kindness shown to his wife — whom the general fairly worshipped — Marsh's appointment to

the post tradership of Fort Sill was procured; and if any money was received it was received by Mrs. Belknap, whose estate was entirely separate from that of the Secretary, and without the knowledge of her husband."

The political foes of Belknap responded less charitably to the editor's inquiry: "we were greeted with, 'Well, *Constitution*, how would you like a post tradership?' 'How's Belknap stock now?' and when we stated that we came to seek, not to give an opinion, we generally got a reply to the effect although he was honest when he left here, his evil associations had corrupted him, and he was in the same boat now with other 'financiers.'"

Even the staunchest Republican newspapers, such as the Des Moines *Iowa State Register*, were reluctant to defend Belknap. At most, the pro-Belknap faction cautioned against judging before all the evidence was in, yet the underlying tone of their comments hinted they feared the worst. Though Iowa was perhaps the most solidly Republican state in the Union during the post-Civil War period, Belknap's hasty resignation and the Grant administration's sordid reputation — an embarrassment the Iowa party leaders normally ignored — had prepared Republican minds for the ultimate blow. The rapid polarization of papers on the issue along strict party lines underscored the political nature of subsequent proceedings against Belknap. He may or may not have been guilty, but the Democrats nationally and in Iowa seized the opportunity to play up the impeachment trial as an election issue.

Ensconced in his fashionable house, Belknap suffered miserably in the

aftermath of his resignation. The city was abuzz with speculation, and as Julia Dent Grant wrote: "Red-mouthed rumor held high carnival at the capital." Marsh had fled to Canada immediately after his testimony to the committee, and many speculated Belknap planned to do the same. One false report said Belknap had committed suicide. An Army officer responded with the comment: "If Belknap had only the courage of a mouse, he *would* kill himself." Others rumored that Puss had a male admirer on the Committee on Expenditures, a would-be lover who used his position to get even for a supposed rebuff.

Cyrus Clay Carpenter, then Second Comptroller of the U.S. Treasury following two terms as Republican Governor of Iowa, went reluctantly to visit the General. He found him a pitiful sight, looking ill and unhappy. Leaving the "broken & sad" man, Carpenter wrote in his diary that he "bawled like a calf" after the interview. Other visitors, none so ardent Republicans as Carpenter who seldom if ever questioned the party line in his long political career, found the ex-Secretary just as pathetic. The *Keokuk Daily Constitution* carried this description written by an Army officer who saw Belknap:

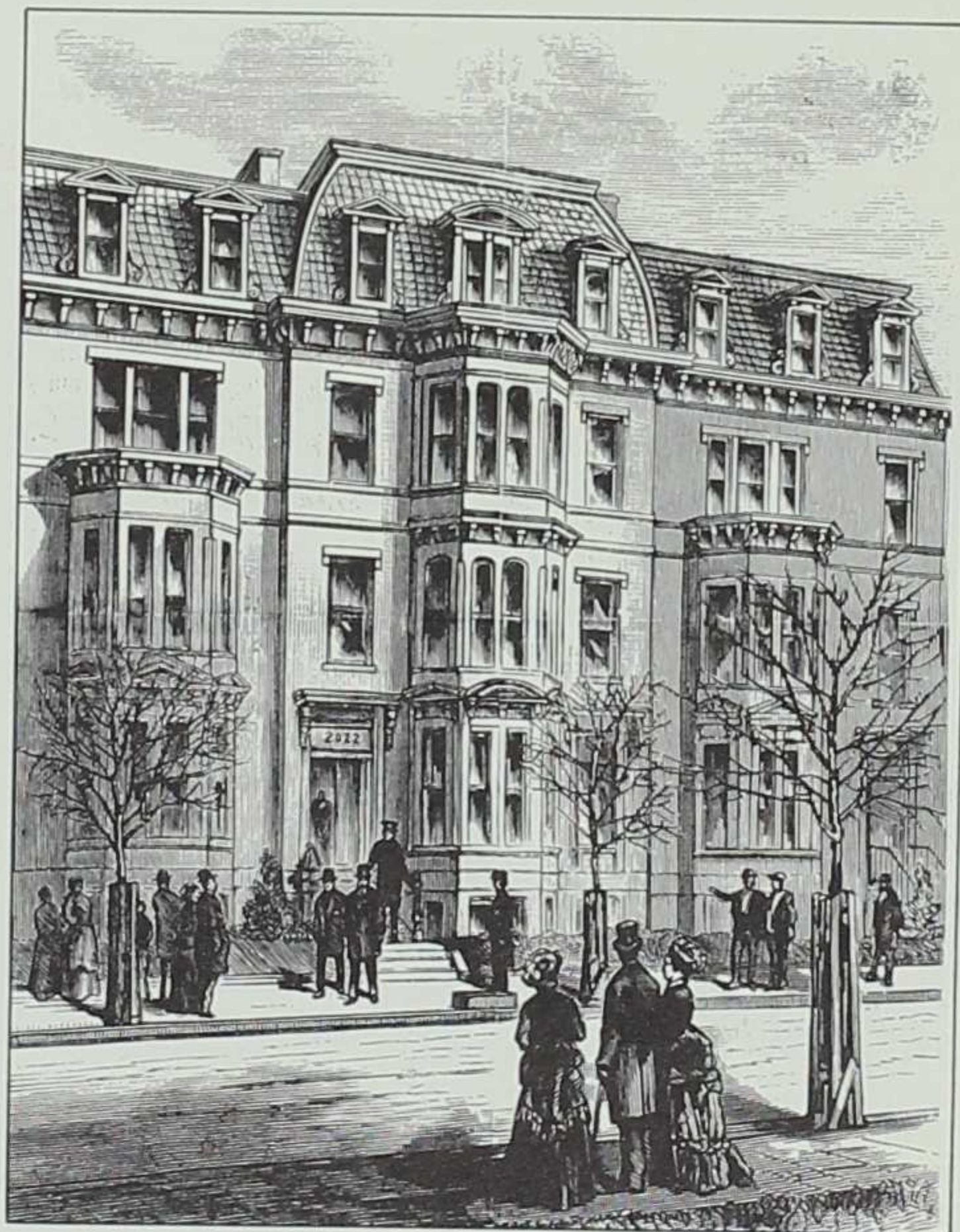
My God! Words fail to express how this man has aged and suffered during the last few days. His flowing, sticky beard was knotted and tangled; his hair was unkempt; great black rings were under his eyes, and his sunken cheeks made up a picture of woe and despair that would have touched a heart of stone. I was so moved that I sprang forward with a word of comfort. Regardless of truth, I said: 'Mr. Secretary, I believe you to be an honest man.' Belknap at this caught me hard by the hand and burst into tears. He was completely unmanned. He choked

and sobbed several moments, then managed to stammer out, 'I am going to prove it to the people of this country that I am an honest man before this business is over.'

In the week following the impeachment and resignation Belknap was indicted by a civil court and placed under house arrest. At the insistence of his Cabinet, President Grant finally came to understand the seriousness of the charges against his former comrade in arms. Grant directed that criminal charges be brought against Belknap. Edwards Pierrepont, Attorney General of the United States, placed armed guards around Belknap's home. In the end, nothing came of the indictment, and after posting \$25,000 bond, Belknap could once again move freely.

The scene shifted to the House of Representatives on March 8, where a long series of legal maneuvers began, leading up to the impeachment trial in the Senate. Between March and June, the House Committee on Expenditures in the War Department held further hearings on irregularities in post traderships. Marsh was enticed back into the country to testify again. John Evans, Orvil Lynch Grant, and James Tomlinson (Puss's brother) appeared before the committee. Perhaps the most colorful witness was General George Armstrong Custer. Testifying in April, the flamboyant general denounced Belknap and several other high officials for their conduct in running the frontier posts. Belknap supporters and Republicans in Congress were outraged, but Custer's annoying presence was effectively and terminally removed by the Sioux on June 26.

Belknap's trial opened in the U.S. Sen-



Belknap arrested and led away for indictment from his fashionable home. (From Leslie's, March 25, 1876, courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Iconographic Collections)

ate on April 4. The House named seven Representatives as Managers to act as prosecution attorneys during the trial. Four of the Managers were first-term legislators, but most of them were experienced lawyers. Chief Justice of the United States Morrison Waite swore in the Senators on April 5, and the opening arguments were set for later in the month.

Belknap's line of defense immediately became apparent. He told the Senate the impeachment was invalid because he was a private citizen when the resolutions were brought against him on the floor of the House. President Grant had officially accepted his resignation at 10:20 AM on March 2, and Belknap had informed the committee of this in writing by 11:00. Clymer's charges were not

officially lodged until the afternoon of the same day.

The Senate reacted to this line of defense with a protracted debate over the issue of jurisdiction. On May 8, the trial temporarily adjourned while individual Senators prepared legal briefs on the question. On May 29, the Senate voted 35 to 22 to hear the case. The vote was significant. If 22 Senators voted against the right of jurisdiction (and could not be persuaded otherwise), the two-thirds majority needed to convict Belknap on the charges was foredoomed.

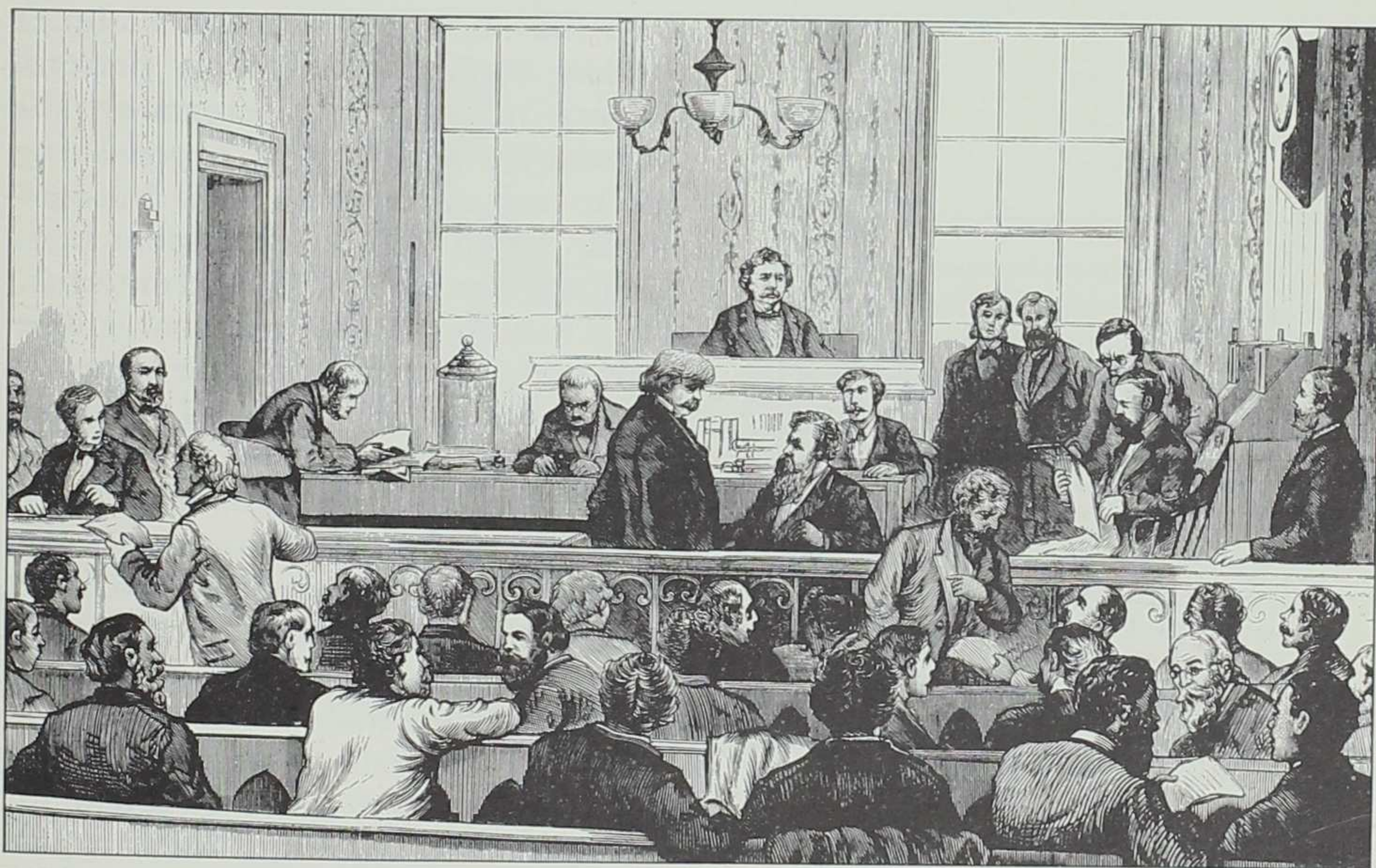
Belknap was represented by three of the finest lawyers in Washington: Jeremiah Black, Montgomery Blair, and Matthew Carpenter. All experienced lawyers and politicians, they were noted also for their oratorical skills in an age which still prized public speaking. Their first move was to refuse to enter a plea to the charge on the ground that the Senate had no right to hear the case. After some wrangling, the Senate overrode the defense and voted to accept an implied plea of not guilty. The defense also was unable to convince the Senate to postpone the trial until after the national election in November.

When the direct arguments began in July, the House Managers, acting as the prosecution, attempted to show that Belknap had not only been a party to the Marsh-Evans agreement, but that the Secretary had lobbied for the law giving the Secretary of War power to appoint post traderships in the first place. In general, the Managers did not present an

effective case. They muddled the issues and failed to attack along clear lines. For example, they spent much of their time trying to establish that Marsh was a poor choice for the tradership or that the prices at Ft. Sill were too high.

The defense, on the other hand, responded well to the charges. They pointed out there was no evidence of a deal *directly* between Marsh and Belknap. The money had all been given to Belknap's wives — first Carita and then Puss. Whatever Marsh may have assumed about Belknap's knowledge of the source of the pay-offs, there was no proof the Secretary regarded them as anything but gifts. The defense attorneys called a series of character witnesses to the stand on July 12. Ralph Lowe, Belknap's law partner, Iowa Senators William B. Allison and George Wright, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Miller (an old Keokuk friend of Belknap), and Iowa Representative John Kasson all testified to Belknap's reputation and high standing in Iowa. Finally, on July 20, a flurry of magnificent oratory from defense lawyer Carpenter ended the arguments.

The vote on the first article of impeachment came on August 1. The Senate voted 35 guilty and 25 not guilty — short of the two-thirds needed for conviction. With minor variations, the tallies remained the same on the following articles. Of the 25 Senators who voted for acquittal, 23 publicly declared they believed Belknap to be guilty of receiving bribes, but they were not con-



Belknap arraigned in police court on March 8. (From Leslie's, March 25, 1876, courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Iconographic Collections)

vinced of the Senate's jurisdiction. Only two Senators, one of them Iowan Wright, declared the evidence insufficient to prove Belknap received the money with the intent to take a bribe. But all the Senators believed he took the money.

Was Belknap corrupt? There is, of course, no definitive answer. He may, however, have had compelling reasons to need extra income. Soon after the first revelations, Gen. William T. Sherman, Belknap's old commander and the man who recommended Belknap for the post of Secretary of War, gave a newspaper interview in which he blamed Belknap's disgrace on the "pres-

ures" of Washington social life. Sherman told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*:

In my opinion his downfall is due more to the vicious organization of Washington society than anything else. I refer to the ridiculous extravagancies of those who move in the first social circles at the capital. Very few Cabinet officers are able to live within their salaries.

This explanation, Belknap's need for ever more money as a reason for taking the bribes, became widely-accepted within a short time. Iowa newspapers echoed Sherman's statement, and Iowa historians have repeated the idea that Belknap was living far beyond his means.

Note on Sources

The most important source for this article is "The Trial of William W. Belknap," *Congressional Record*, 44th Cong., 1st sess., Vol. 4, Pts. 2 and 7. Belknap's private papers are preserved at Princeton University and held on microfilm by the Division of the State Historical Society in Iowa City. Several Iowa newspapers were consulted for local reaction to the scandal and are cited specifically in the text. The staff of the Division of Historical Museum and Archives in Des Moines, where many of the papers are located, was helpful.

The best single account of Belknap's troubles is Roger D. Bridges' unpublished M.A. thesis, "The Impeachment and Trial of William Worth Belknap, Secretary of War" (University of Northern Iowa, 1963). Mr. Bridges graciously allowed me to use his thesis in preparing this article. Robert C. Prickett, "The Malfeasance of William Worth Belknap," a Ph.D. dissertation published in *North Dakota History*, 17 (Jan., Apr. 1950), 5-51, 97-134, deals with the story from the western viewpoint.

Biographical sketches of Belknap may be found in *The Dictionary of American Biography* (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 147-48 and *The Iowa Historical Record*, 1, 3 (July 1885), 97-100. Belknap's military career is given in *The History of the Fifteenth Regiment Iowa Volunteer Infantry* (Keokuk: 1887), 18-27. His obituary appeared in the *New York Times* for Oct. 14, 1890. Of special interest is Philip D. Jordan's article, "The Domestic Finances of Secretary of War W. W. Belknap," *Iowa Journal of History*, 52 (July 1954), 193-202.

Also helpful were stories in *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* for 1876. The comments of the President's wife are from John Simon (ed.), *The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant* (N.Y.: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 189-92. Chapter 33 of Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish, The Inner History of the Grant Administration* (N.Y.: Frederick Ungar, 1936) gives an unpleasant picture of Belknap through the diary of Fish. Cyrus Clay Carpenter's diary is in the Carpenter Papers at the Division of the Historical Society and quoted in Mildred Throne, *Cyrus Clay Carpenter and Iowa Politics, 1854-1898* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1974), 202.

My special thanks for advice and help to Philip D. Jordan, Timothy N. Hyde, Robert K. Bower, and Charles Phillips.

In 1954, however, historian Philip D. Jordan examined Belknap's personal papers in order to determine the Secretary's income and expenditures and to analyze their role in his behavior. Jordan found that Belknap spent fairly large sums on food, drink, and entertainment, but his household expenses were well within the \$8000 a year salary he earned as Secretary of War. There were several large categories not accounted for in Belknap's private papers, but it is reasonable to assume along with Jordan that the Secretary had no overwhelming need to supplement his income through graft.

Following the trial, however, Belknap was impoverished. His letters to his family indicated he was strapped for money to live on. Shortly after the acquittal, Puss and her daughters left Washington for Paris, where they lived until Belknap's death. The ex-Secretary moved to Philadelphia for a while, but eventually he returned to Washington and established a successful, if quiet, law practice. In later years, he was active in the Grand Army of the Republic, the powerful Civil War veterans' organization.

His memory is enshrined in most Iowa history references as a noble warrior — perhaps because of the staunch support of his fellow veterans in later years. His biographies in the *Iowa Historical Record* and the official history of the Fifteenth Iowa Infantry discuss his military career at length and only briefly mention he was Secretary of War. Other



A political cartoon, published in April 1876, anticipates Grant's retirement from the Presidency. Uncle Sam offers him a rail pass back to Galena with the comment, "So now take your offspring and go West, old man! Go West!" The teary-eyed sibling on the right is, of course, former Secy. Belknap. (From Leslie's, April 8, 1876, courtesy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Iconographic Collections)

histories, written by men who knew Belknap, play down his impeachment or pronounce him an innocent victim of circumstance. Reading these accounts of Belknap's life, one would scarcely know he was at the center of a major national political scandal.

From the moment of Clymer's revelations until Belknap's death in 1890, the Secretary refused to comment (even privately in correspondence) on his possible guilt. He was consistent in declaring his innocence, and at the same

time, reluctant to implicate his family, especially Carita and her sick child. Even a careful sifting of the historical evidence can neither completely condemn nor clear Belknap. A comment, however, directed by the *Keokuk Daily Constitution* at President Ulysses S. Grant seems equally suited as an epitaph for Belknap's public career: "[He] must either be a . . . hypocritical knave, or one of the most witless fools that ever occupied public station." □

THE RELUCTANT CANDIDATE:

Edwin T. Meredith and the 1924
Democratic National Convention

by
Peter L. Petersen

This thing has got to come to an end," Will Rogers told delegates to the 1924 Democratic National Convention. "New York invited you people here as guests, not to live." For nearly two weeks and seemingly endless ballots, rival supporters of William Gibbs McAdoo and New York Governor Al Smith had deadlocked party proceedings. Night after night weary Democrats filed out of the convention hall at Tex Rickard's old Madison Square Garden and headed for their hotels and a few hours of badly needed sleep before the resumption of another round of monotonous balloting. Never before had a party been so stalemated; never before had one taken so many ballots. And still it had failed to select a presidential candidate.

As the balloting neared the 100 mark, far surpassing the previous record set on the eve of the Civil War, even the die-hards in the Smith and McAdoo camps realized that there was no hope of nominating their first choice. Late in the evening of July 8, the thirteenth day of the convention, Smith and McAdoo met at the Ritz Carlton hotel. The meeting had been arranged by friends of the two men with the specific intent of getting both to withdraw in favor of a mutually

acceptable candidate. Accounts of what happened at the meeting differ, but on one point both Smith and McAdoo agree — the name most prominently mentioned was that of a 47-year-old Iowa publisher, Edwin T. Meredith of Des Moines. Smith ultimately refused to endorse Meredith and the meeting broke up without any agreement. It was not Smith's rejection of Meredith that makes the Iowan's role in the convention unusual, however, but rather that he was even considered at all. Seldom in the annals of American politics has there been a more reluctant candidate.

Edwin T. Meredith first gained prominence as a businessman. Indeed, publicist Bruce Barton once observed that "if an author were writing a novel and wanted to picture as the hero a typical successful American, in the best sense of the phrase, he could find no better model than Mr. Meredith." Born at Avoca in northeastern Pottawattamie County in 1876, Meredith came to Des Moines at the age of 16 to attend Highland Park College. But he soon dropped out of school to go to work for his grandfather, the publisher of the *Farmers' Tribune*, a small weekly newspaper. By the time he was 19,

young Meredith was the owner of the paper, and during the next few years, he gradually increased its circulation and profits. In 1902 he began publication of a new monthly magazine called *Successful Farming*. Meredith filled the pages of his new agricultural journal with practical advice for farmers and took extraordinary precautions to protect his readers from unscrupulous advertisers. So rapid was the growth of *Successful Farming* that within ten years its founder was widely recognized as one of the nation's most innovative and successful publishers — an evaluation still accepted by historians and journalists over a half century later.

In politics, Meredith was a Democrat, a progressive, and a supporter of prohibition. A great admirer of Woodrow Wilson, the publisher unsuccessfully sought office twice in traditionally Republican Iowa. Despite such setbacks, he remained eager to render what he called "public service." And increasingly, particularly after the United States entered World War I in 1917, President Wilson called upon Meredith for assistance. He served on the Treasury Department's Advisory Committee on Excess Profits, traveled to Europe at Wilson's request to meet with various political and labor leaders, and represented the public sector of the economy at the National Industrial Conference in 1919. Although each of these appointments carried with it increased responsibility and prestige, Meredith's nomination to the Cabinet as Secretary



Edwin T. Meredith (courtesy of the Meredith Publishing Company, Des Moines)

of Agriculture in early 1920 came as a pleasant surprise for the publisher.

At the age of 43 Meredith was by far the youngest member of the Wilson Cabinet, and his youth coupled with vigorous and widely applauded efforts to ease agriculture's painful postwar reconversion brought Meredith considerable national attention. Within weeks following his appointment to the Cabinet, observers were suggesting that the Iowan had a promising future in national politics. Iowa Democrats obviously agreed, for they quickly named Meredith



William McAdoo (Culver Pictures)

their favorite-son candidate for the 1920 Democratic presidential nomination. While no one gave the new Secretary of Agriculture much of a chance at gaining first place on the ticket, many thought that he would make an excellent vice-presidential candidate. Events almost proved them correct. Shortly after James Cox had secured the party's presidential nomination at San Francisco, the Ohioan let it be known that he had narrowed his choice for running mate to two men — Meredith and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Although many workers within the Presidential nominee's organization held out for Meredith, Cox finally opted for Roosevelt, believing that the latter's famous name and New York residence were assets too valuable to ignore.

Meredith was not overly disappointed by his "near miss" and returned to Washington to complete his tenure as Secretary of Agriculture. With the national Republican victory and the advent

of the Harding Administration in 1921, the publisher was again able to devote much of his energy to business. He first purchased another farm journal, the *Dairy Farmer*, eventually to be incorporated into *Successful Farming*. A few months later, in October 1922, the first copies of yet another publication, *Fruit, Garden and Home*, rolled off the Meredith presses in Des Moines. Renamed *Better Homes and Gardens* in 1924 this magazine soon became one of the nation's major publications in terms of circulation and advertising revenue. Despite his increased business responsibilities, Meredith still found time to speak out on political issues, particularly the problems of agriculture.

Although his friends had repeatedly urged him to seek the 1924 presidential nomination, Meredith consistently refused to consider himself a candidate. But as the convention approached, the pressures upon him increased. Clearly the Democrats were in trouble, particularly because party rules required the vote of two-thirds of the delegates for any nomination. McAdoo's business connections with an oilman involved in the ignominious Teapot Dome oil scandal rendered his chances of an early victory unlikely while many rural and Southern Democrats found Smith's Catholicism objectionable, and they also resented "Al-cohol's" lack of enthusiasm for prohibition. Thus as the possibility of a party split developed in 1924, more and more Democrats saw Meredith as the man to bridge the gap between the supporters of Smith and the group behind McAdoo. Some Eastern party leaders, among them Governor Fred Brown of Maine, were said to be quietly pro-

moting a Meredith "boom" by circulating reports that the Iowa publisher was "acceptable to both McAdoo and Smith." According to such newspapers as the Davenport *Democrat* and the Helena (Montana) *Independent*, Meredith would be "the ideal Democratic candidate." He was "untouched by any scandal," the *Democrat* argued. He was widely and favorably known in all parts of the country. He was a man who understood and could win support from agriculture and business. He could be "urged upon the voters everywhere as a man with whom the interests of all would be safe."

Confronted with such arguments, Meredith was appreciative but somewhat embarrassed. For months he had been working to secure support for McAdoo. In Iowa, for example, he had joined with Clyde Herring in ousting Wilbur Marsh, the state's long-time National Committeeman and a staunch McAdoo foe. At the State Democratic Convention held at Davenport in April, Meredith had managed to get himself elected chairman of the pro-McAdoo Iowa delegation to the National Convention. He saw himself as a leader in the McAdoo camp, not a bridge to the other side. Since he placed a high value on personal loyalty, he was inclined now to fight the Smith forces rather than play up to them in order to become their second choice. Even if he could win the nomination just "by running around a city block," he assured David Rockwell, McAdoo's national campaign manager, he would not do so.

Accordingly, when delegates began to assemble in New York in mid-June, Meredith focused his attention not upon winning the nomination for himself but up-

on acting as leader of the McAdoo campaign and upon securing the "strongest agricultural plank possible" in the party platform. But his main problem was keeping the Iowa delegation in line behind McAdoo once the balloting started. New York newspapers carried stories — leaked to the press by Smith supporters within the Iowa delegation in an effort to split McAdoo and Meredith — that said Iowa would soon desert McAdoo for Meredith. The publisher now found himself in the exceedingly awkward position of fighting his own nomination. Clyde Herring tried to ex-



New York Governor Al Smith (Culver Pictures)



The scene on the floor of the convention, 1924. (Culver Pictures)

plain. "Of course we are all for Meredith," he said, "but it would be suicidal to shift to him at this time. If the psychological time comes we'll get behind Meredith and push him strong, but just now and for a long time to come the Iowa vote is going to McAdoo." To restrain his enthusiastic friends, Meredith finally threatened to withdraw his name if it should be put in nomination against his wishes. Ironically, as the deadlock between Smith and McAdoo continued, Meredith's control of the Iowa delegation tightened rather than diminished. When it became obvious to almost everyone that neither Smith nor McAdoo could win the nomination, many saw an improvement in Meredith's chances. But since the publisher's nomination would require the support of

the McAdoo leaders, the Iowa delegates were reluctant to alienate them by breaking away too soon.

And so the convention went on — and on. Rowdies in the galleries (planted by the Smith forces) jeered every mention of McAdoo's name, and members of the Ku Klux Klan in the Texas delegation threatened to demonstrate their opposition to the Catholic Smith by burning a cross at the convention entrance. The party gathering had become, in the words of Arthur Krock, a "snarling, cursing, tedious, tenuous, suicidal, homicidal rough-house. . . ." As the horrible deadlock continued, Democrats grew desperate for a means of escape. Some of them turned to Meredith, now widely viewed as a possible compromise candidate. Party leaders, ordinary delegates,

and newsmen sought him out. Would he break with McAdoo? When did he plan to announce his candidacy? Meredith said he had come to New York with the intention of seeing McAdoo nominated and nothing had happened to change his mind.

Meredith's unyielding support of McAdoo, which pleased some delegates, made him totally unacceptable to the Smith partisans. It did not come as much of a surprise when Smith, at the Ritz Carlton meeting, rejected McAdoo's suggestion that they both step aside in favor of the Iowan. After leaving the hotel, McAdoo announced that he was releasing his delegates. Though not withdrawing his name, McAdoo said that he would now leave his "friends and supporters free to take such action as in their judgment may best serve the interests of the party." Earlier, Franklin D. Roosevelt had read a statement saying that Smith would step aside when McAdoo did. Consequently, on the one hundredth ballot, there was for the first time significant voting for several dark-horse candidates. The ballot was inconclusive. The hour was well past midnight. The leaders were anxious to regroup their forces, and under these circumstances, the fatigued Democrats finally voted for adjournment until noon.

While most of the delegates attempted to rest, the party leaders hurried into conferences. At the Vanderbilt Hotel, Meredith, Herring, and Gavin McNab, the head of the California delegation, gathered with McAdoo. By now newspapers were carrying the story that Meredith would have the support of the McAdoo forces when the balloting resumed. At the same time reporters de-

tected a growing boom, seemingly with the encouragement of the Smith people, for John W. Davis. And there was some support, observers noted, for two other possibilities, Oscar W. Underwood and Thomas J. Walsh. Before July 9, Meredith consistently refused to take his own chances for the nomination seriously. Nor had he ever really thought of himself as having the ability and experience that the Presidency demanded. Now, influenced by the urging of his friends, Meredith erased some of this self-doubt and was willing at least to accept the nomination. But because of his previous loyalty to McAdoo he had repeatedly discouraged the development of any semblance of a personal organization, even declining offers of support



William Jennings Bryan (Culver Pictures)

from Oklahoma and Colorado delegates once the convention started. Thus, when his "moment" came, he had no one, with the possible exception of the amateurish Herring, to push his cause.

The speculation, moreover, that Meredith would become the candidate of the McAdoo bloc proved to be unfounded. Instead of acting as a unit, the bloc simply broke apart. A bitter and frustrated McAdoo seemed interested only in fleeing to Europe on the first available ship. Many of his floor leaders had also given up the fight. In the end, only William J. Bryan, the party's thrice-nominated presidential candidate, appeared to be exerting much effort on Meredith's behalf. The Iowa publisher, he told reporters, was "one of the best of the progressives," one that was distinctly preferable to Davis. And, in a way, this was the kiss of death. Bryan's power to influence the Democratic Party had long since passed. He had been hooted and jeered by the ill-mannered convention galleries and he now was anathema to many delegates.

On the 101st ballot, Meredith received only 130 votes, nearly 50 of them traceable to Bryan's influence with the Texas and Nebraska delegations. Much of the previous McAdoo strength went elsewhere. California, for instance, gave the Iowa publisher only three votes. On the next ballot, Meredith's total slipped to 66 while both Davis and Underwood made gains. Reluctantly many of the McAdoo people now swung behind Davis. At the conclusion of the 103rd ballot, the West Virginian stood at 575, enough to set off a stampede. All across the convention floor, delegation leaders, many standing on chairs, were shouting "Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!" The

Iowa delegation, first to be recognized, announced that it wished to shift its vote from Meredith to Davis. Other delegations followed suit, and when the changes were recorded, Davis had a final total of 844 votes. After 14 weary days, the party had a presidential candidate, and jubilant delegates clogged the aisles of the Madison Square Garden convention hall, as pleased with the prospect of going home as they were with the nominee.

Following Davis' nomination, those who were eager to bring the convention to an end urged that its chairman, Senator Thomas J. Walsh, be nominated for Vice-President. Walsh, however, his "bushy eyebrows" bristling "like a cat's back at the sight of a dog," questioned the wisdom of acting on impulse. He called for a vote to adjourn until 8:30 in the evening, and although reporters believed that "the noes had it by far," he banged his gavel and pronounced the motion carried and adjourned the session. Davis then met with members of the party hierarchy at the Manhattan Club. They decided that second place would have to go to someone from the agricultural "West," and Davis first offered the position to Walsh, who seemed to be the convention favorite. When Walsh declined, saying that he preferred to continue his work in the Senate, Davis turned to Meredith, who told him that they should get "a man who can carry his State." Iowa, he pointed out, was Republican, and there was "no hope" of its "going Democratic." George Brennan of Illinois then suggested the Governor of Nebraska, Charles Bryan. There appeared to be no one else in sight; and since the delegates, anxious to bring the convention ordeal to an end,



"A New Lochinvar out of the West" was the caption on this J. N. "Ding" Darling cartoon from the Des Moines Register. Meredith advances on the Democratic citadel in 1926 — unfortunately he died before the next convention. (courtesy of the J. N. "Ding" Darling Foundation and the Ding Darling Collection, University of Iowa Libraries)



John W. Davis (Culver Pictures)

were growing restless, Davis reluctantly accepted Brennan's suggestion.

In all probability, Meredith would have made a stronger vice-presidential candidate than Charles Bryan. Like the nominee, he was from the West, a progressive, and a dry, thus fulfilling the requirements that party leaders felt to be essential. In addition, Meredith's identification with the Wilson Administration, his well-known sympathy for agriculture and labor, his "poor boy makes good" business career, and his connections with the press, particularly with farm journals, would have been valuable assets that Bryan did not possess. And finally, he would not have offered the target to the opposition that Bryan did. Throughout the campaign,

many Republicans would choose to ignore Davis and attack Bryan, the "Western radical," some going so far as to conjure up visions of a Bryan sitting in the White House. Scare tactics of this sort would have been much less effective if Meredith had been on the ticket. While most historians agree that Davis could not have won with a different running mate, it is likely that he would have garnered more votes with Meredith at his side.

Meredith, when he joined Davis at the Manhattan Club, had realized that an offer of second place was a strong possibility. His name had been mentioned before, and once Davis had begun to loom as a likely presidential nominee, it had been mentioned frequently. On July 2, for instance, Senator Thomas Heflin of Alabama was reported to have predicted that the eventual compromise would be Davis and Meredith. The publisher's decision, then, was considered beforehand, and he would recall that it was "the hardest thing" he had to do during the entire convention. His friends, his family, and many of the Iowa delegates had urged him to accept, and acceptance, he acknowledged, "would have been quite a victory for Iowa . . ." especially for those on the delegation who had followed his every wish throughout the tedious balloting. For this reason, he had been at one stage "almost disposed" to accept. But somehow, he had not been able to shake the conviction that doing so would be a "mistake," one that would involve too

great a sacrifice in convenience, finances, "political future," and "everything else." "I may have an exaggerated idea of the matter," he told a press conference upon his return to Des Moines, "but I feel that in giving my attention to publications going into the homes of 1,500,000 families, doing what we can for the progressive thought of the country, right living and better methods, I am rendering a greater service than I could possibly render by presiding over the Senate of the United States."

Although the publisher and many of his Democratic friends could not say so publicly, there was the widespread feeling that Meredith was fortunate in not being a member of a ticket so obviously doomed to defeat at the polls in November. He was still young and his supporters reasoned that he would likely have a chance at the nomination sometime in the future. But such was not to be. In the years following 1924, his health began to fail. On June 17, 1928, only a few days before the Democratic National Convention opened in Houston, 51 year old Edwin T. Meredith succumbed to complications resulting from acute hypertension.

One final question. If he had enthusiastically sought it, could Meredith have gained the Democratic presidential nomination in 1924? The publisher obviously thought so. In a letter to Clyde Herring, written shortly after both men had returned to Des Moines from New York, Meredith took friendly exception to Herring's assertion that there were

only 300 potential Meredith votes at the Convention. "You and I know," Meredith insisted, "that regardless of whether it was Meredith, Cordell Hull, Walsh, [Carter] Glass, or [Joseph T.] Robinson, had the McAdoo fellows united a couple of days earlier on some candidate and gradually built his vote up that he would have received far more than 300 votes and that there would have been a real chance for his nomination." Whether Meredith's view was an

Note on Sources

The Edwin T. Meredith Papers of the University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections, Iowa City, were of primary importance in the preparation of this article. Other manuscript sources consulted include the William Gibbs McAdoo Papers and the William Jennings Bryan Papers, both housed in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The *New York Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor* contain detailed, day-by-day accounts of the lengthy 1924 Democratic National Convention, while the *Des Moines Register* followed the activities of the Iowa delegation. Richard C. Bain, *Convention Decisions and Voting Records* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1960) has a convenient summary of the prolonged balloting. A recent study of the Democratic party during the 1920s is David Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition, 1918-1932* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968). Burl Noggle, *Teapot Dome: Oil and Politics in the 1920s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962) is the standard work on the oil scandal, while David H. Stratton, "Splattered with Oil: William G. McAdoo and the 1924 Democratic Presidential Nomination," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 44 (June 1963), 62-75, and Lee N. Allen, "The McAdoo Campaign for the Presidential Nomination in 1924," *The Journal of Southern History*, 29 (May 1963), 211-28, trace the impact of the scandal upon McAdoo's presidential ambitions. Alfred E. Smith, *Up to Now: An Autobiography* (New York: The Viking Press, 1929) mentions the rejection of Meredith as a compromise nominee. For a broad view of Meredith's political career, see Peter L. Petersen, "A Publisher in Politics: Edwin T. Meredith, Progressive Reform, and the Democratic Party, 1912-1928" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1971). A grant from the West Texas State University Committee on Organized Research assisted in the preparation of this article.



T. J. Walsh addresses the convention. (Culver Pictures)

accurate assessment of delegate sentiment during the closing days of the convention is, of course, impossible to determine. But on one essential point there can be little disagreement. As long as Meredith remained a reluctant can-

didate, one unwilling actively to seek support, his chances of securing the presidential nomination were almost nil. In modern American politics, such an honor is rarely handed to someone who does not reach for it. □

The Character of the Country: Excerpts

EDITED BY
LOREN N. HORTON

"Since coming to Dubuque I have got to know the town very well and the character of the Country round about."

—James Lonsdale Broderick

In 1876, James Lonsdale Broderick, a land agent and a member of an old farming family, came from Swaledale in England to Dubuque for the winter. During his six months' stay he kept a diary of his travel, his impressions of Iowa and the people he met. Many of those people were relatives of families Broderick knew in England. They had emigrated to Dubuque during the early part of the nineteenth century when serious unemployment occurred in the lead-mining industry of Swaledale, an isolated valley in Yorkshire where farming and the mining of lead ore had been the chief occupations since Roman times. When Broderick visited this colony of Yorkshire people in Dubuque, he was well-equipped to observe their daily life and work habits. As agent for a wealthy and well-connected peer of the realm, Broderick was familiar with farming techniques and the raising of livestock. He shrewdly assessed what he saw and carefully noted what would be useful to him.

The following excerpts are taken from his diary, edited by Loren N. Horton, and on sale now from the Division of the State Historical Society.

DECEMBER, 1876. We went the other day to see Ryan's pig-killing and Pork-packing Establishment. It is not easy to describe the horrors of such a place. When we entered the ground floor, we could scarcely see anything, our eyes being accustomed and set to the bright snow outside. We seemed in danger of being run over by men wheeling barrels of lard and pork. The floor was very dirty. We went to the office, a room on one side, and got permission of Mr. Ryan to go above to see the pigs slaughtered. We passed a host of butchers cutting up, next gutting, then about 15 scrapers, arranged on each side of a long bench upon which the pigs were rolled from one to another. We had some difficulty in passing them as there was barely room to walk behind them on account of an opening between the flooring and the wall through which the scrapings fell. The vapor arising from the scalding-vat filled all the room with such a dense fog that it was impossible to see anything more than 1 yard off. We would hear the pigs screaming, the hot water splashing, see next to nothing, and the stench from the cleaners below was dreadful. Pushing forward we next came to the vat in which 5 or 6 newly-killed pigs were being scalded. Two men with poles were pushing them about and keeping them under water. When ready for scraping they are tipped out, one at a time, on to the bench.

Ed.

Climbing some steps we came to the

place where the atrocities were being perpetuated, a room divided by a partition 4 ft. 6 in. high or so, with a door to pass the pigs through from the catcher to the butcher. The catcher puts a short chain round the hind leg of a pig and hooks it on to another chain connected to the Steam Engine. Another man pulls a rope and the pig is drawn out from the rest, and hangs by one leg, head downwards, screaming lustily. The short chain is next attached to another, which hangs from a little pulley shaped wheel, and the Engine chain is detached. There is a bar of iron extending round the room on which the little wheel runs. The pig is then pushed forward through the door to the butcher, who takes hold of a foreleg and sticks the knife into it. It is then pushed on again to those just killed before. When the first is dead it is sent down a slide into the scalding vat, before mentioned. The pigs are driven up an incline to the top of the building thus saving an amount of lifting which would otherwise have to be done. It is very interesting and instructive to see such things done on a large scale, but I must say that I have not the slightest desire to go there again. As many as 700 hogs were killed in this establishment in one day.

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FRIDAY, DEC. 8. Yesterday Evening Mr. Woodward and I went as invited by Mr. Coates to eat Venison with him. Mrs. Coates had made a pie of it which was very good, and some of it was fried, also very good but rather hard. We had Green Tea, as usual, since coming to Iowa, which was good, but I do not like it so well as good



James Lonsdale Broderick

black tea. After the cream is put in, it looks exactly the color of whey. After tea Mrs. John R. Waller came in and we had a long discussion on the election of President and Tax Officers, the franchise, and the merits of the two systems of Government in England and the U.S. I find that our Government has a great many admirers in America, who are tired of the constant

change of Office holders, re-elections, the ignorant vote, the Catholic vote governed by the Priests, and the shameful way in which the Newspapers of both Republicans and Democrats try to degrade the opposite Party and the characters of the individuals representing it. The American Newspapers are very poor affairs in the way of Politics and, to pamper the tastes of the multitude, indulge in monstrous headings and spiteful language. Some of them have, notwithstanding, the merit of sparing no pains in gathering news from all parts of the world. If the Americans desired better Papers, of course, they could get them, at the same price as the bad ones; therefore, they (majority) have no one to blame but themselves for it.

How this system of Universal suffrage, which now seems to be a source of danger to the U.S., will answer when a higher stage of intellectual development is attained, remains to be shown in the future, but certain, it is, there are at present large numbers to whom it is pure folly to entrust with a vote.

.....

MONDAY, DEC. 25, CHRISTMAS DAY. It is surprising where all the turkeys are raised that are eaten here, and the chickens. The beef about Dubuque is very inferior with scarcely any fat upon it. The people here won't buy fat meat, and when they do, they make the butcher take it off. And the hams are trimmed down till they are nothing but lean, the fat being melted down into lard. When one dines with the Americans they give one all kinds

of eatables and nearly all at once, filling the plate as long as it will hold anything. At the Hotels a man orders everything that he imagines he can eat, and they are all placed before him at once. He is then compelled to eat very quickly or some of his dainties would get cold. Is it not better to have things served up in succession, just as required, and to take a little more time? Of course the Americans live well, on three meals a day, with butcher's meat to every meal; in other words, they live upon "three dinners a day."

.....

MONDAY, FEB. 26. I saw Simon Brunskill at Wm. Woodward's. He is getting old. He cannot talk very well; there is something the matter with his throat. He seems partly paralyzed. He talked about my father and told me that he was a very strong young man and that he used to mow for them at Spring End [Broderick's home]. He remembers their building Gunnerside Bridge and their putting a bottle of Brandy into the South pier. Some old man, who was tipsy, asked for and got a taste of it before it was put in and shed tears when he saw it securely walled in, where he could never again get at it to taste it.

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TUESDAY, MAR. 20. We drove out to the [New Melleray] Monastery; as we had two very excellent horses and a light cutter, the sleighing was good The Brothers (Monks) were very kind to us. They put up our horses and fed them well. Father Bernard was trying to cure the paralysed arm of a

boy with a galvanic Battery. He does a little doctoring. There were others there for his advice. Father Albrecht and another showed us a very fine thoroughbred shorthorn bull that had taken several prizes. In Illinois last year he was shown against an imported bull that cost £3,000 and took the prize. He is a mixture of the Booth and Bates' breed. They have some very good thoroughbred cows. One or two of them were beauties. I found fault with one of their cows on account of its being too wide across the hips; one of them said he never heard of a cow being too wide in the hips before. I explained to him that the fashion in that respect had altered of late in England. They seemed to think me a great judge of Shorthorns. They had a number of young horses. Their cows were not all shorthorns; they say the first cross between the common cows and shorthorn bull make the best bullocks. Some of them, the shorthorns, have laid out all winter. They have any quantity of hogs, mostly black and black and white. They were all rooting in the middens for corn. We saw about 300 sheep. They have a splendid barn. The hay mow which is in the middle is furnished with a horse-forking apparatus [and] an entrance for the wagons loaded with hay. A wooden rail under the ridge tree is so fixed that when the forkful of hay is raised from the wagon it can be carried to any part of the building. The Brothers number about 58 and do all their own

work. We were invited to lunch and had beef, bread, cheese, butter, and each a bottle of wine of their own making. They are building a new Monastery and have got a portion of it completed. They have two steam-boilers from which to run 4 or 5 rows of iron pipes all round the Chapel and other rooms. When in the Chapel, Albrecht requested us to join their order and bring them some money into the concern. We jokingly declined saying we could not manage to rise at 2 in the morning for prayers, &c. They go to bed at 7 in Winter and 8 in Summer and rise at two. They occupy and own 2,900 acres of land at the Monastery and have another farm at Council Bluffs on the Missouri. They all wear cowls with a leather belt round the waist and long white smocks of cloth. We did not see more than 12 of them. □

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