

Comment by the Editor

PARTY OR PERSON

Before 1840, political party affiliations of Iowa voters were more hypothetical than effective. No doubt the pioneers brought to the frontier political predilections they had formed in eastern States where national politics influenced suffrage more decisively. A man counted himself a Democrat or a Whig more by habit than in principle. Newspaper editors indicated their party preference but not very emphatically. They were inclined to deplore the injection of national issues into local politics. And, as Delegate W. W. Chapman explained, party conflict at home might jeopardize Territorial interests in Congress.

Biographers and historians, in their zeal for classification, have labelled the early public officials of Iowa as Whigs or Democrats. In many instances such designations might have been acquired after 1840 and projected into the earlier years on an assumption of political consistency. There were no precise tests of party membership before the nominating conventions and Tippecanoe clubs were organized in the campaign of Harrison against Van Buren. Though Iowans

could not vote for President, they were affected by national conditions and participated in the partisan demonstrations. But in spite of barbecues, torch-light parades, hard cider, "Tippecanoe and Tyler too", party affiliation had relatively little effect in the election of local officials.

Various factors contributed to independent voting. Over the vital problems of law enforcement, land titles, and community improvements there were no sharp differences of opinion. Rivalry over the location of county seats and other special advantages, which was translated into political action, was more geographical than partisan. The principal issue in early Iowa elections pertained to the personal reputation of the candidates. Inasmuch as there were no party or official ballots, each voter was obliged to designate his favorite candidate for each office. Straight-ticket voting was impossible. And in the computation of political assets, such virtues as integrity, diligence, thrift, friendliness, and piety were much more valuable than party affiliation.

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