

Presidential Hopes

“I think no other person ever came so near the Presidency of the United States, and missed it.” Thus wrote Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts in his *Autobiography of Seventy Years*, referring to the failure of Senator William B. Allison of Iowa to secure the Republican nomination for the presidency in the convention of 1888. While the statement is not historically accurate, it indicates that the best opportunity an Iowan ever had to secure the presidency of the United States was lost.

The candidacy of Senator Allison for the Republican nomination was formally launched at the State convention held in the Grand Opera House at Des Moines on March 21 and 22, 1888. Assembled there were the Republican leaders of the State, old and young, filled with enthusiasm for Allison. To the brilliant young orator from Fort Dodge, Jonathan P. Dolliver, was assigned the honor of acting as temporary chairman, and in that capacity delivering the keynote speech of the convention.

Without delay Dolliver announced that it was the purpose of the Republicans of Iowa to present “the name of a representative western statesman — William B. Allison” — as a candidate for the presidential nomination. He then delivered a stirring eulogy of Iowa’s “favorite son”, referring to his

long record of a quarter of a century in Washington. Dolliver made it clear that it was necessary for the Republicans to nominate a man who could unite the various factions of the party, and who could also bring together the farm and the factory "in a common fight for the national prosperity." "Such a man," declared the orator, "is Wm. B. Allison, the log cabin student of Ohio — the statesman of Iowa."

Later in the day, after the convention had been permanently organized, a report of the resolutions committee was brought in, formally presenting the name of Allison to the Republicans of the country "not from a feeling of State pride, but from the profound conviction that we are acting in obedience to an obligation now resting upon the Republicans everywhere, to urge the selection only of the strongest and best candidate". The resolution was adopted with "tremendous cheers". That night an enthusiastic ratifying meeting was held, and an Allison brigade was organized to attend the National Republican Convention in Chicago.

During the three months intervening before the national convention the Allison campaign was pushed in other States. By the end of April, Allison supporters were confident that the Northwest would be very solid for him, and hope was expressed that Illinois and New York would support him "at the right time". But long before the time set for the convention it was evident that none of the "favorite sons", who had been put forward by their respective

States, would have the majority necessary to secure the nomination.

In view of this situation, the Iowans transferred their activities to Chicago. For about a week before the convention was due to open, that city was "alive with President-makers". Among these were many of the Iowa delegates and others who were present to aid in lining up delegates from other States in support of the Allison candidacy. The Iowa headquarters were established at the Grand Pacific Hotel in a large room, profusely decorated with flags and pictures of Allison. In one corner was a stand where visiting Iowans could obtain Allison badges.

The Iowa delegation had been selected with care and included men of influence and ability. Among the more prominent of them were Senator James F. Wilson, W. P. Hepburn, David B. Henderson, John W. Stone, George D. Perkins, and J. S. Clarkson. Assisting them in the work of organizing the Allison forces were many volunteer workers, including such men as John H. Gear, Jacob Rich, and Charles Beardsley. From all parts of Iowa came individuals and groups eager to help the Allison cause. It was estimated that on the opening day of the convention there were a thousand Iowans in Chicago. The largest delegation came from Dubuque, which was Allison's home city. Accompanying this delegation there were said to be about two hundred Democrats who were as anxious as the Republicans to see Allison nominated.

Nothing was left undone by the Allison managers that would help to create sentiment in favor of the Iowa candidate. On June 19, 1888, the convention began its sessions, and that night the Allison Club staged a street parade for the purpose of stirring up enthusiasm. Under the leadership of Colonel W. H. Thrift, about twelve hundred men formed in marching order at the Iowa headquarters. In the line was the Dubuque Allison Club with about four hundred marchers including the Decorah Drum Corps, the Corn Palace Club of Sioux City with the Knights of Pythias band, and the Des Moines Club with two hundred members present.

The line of march followed Van Buren, State, Madison, Dearborn, Lake, Clark, and Randolph streets to Michigan Avenue, then to Harrison and Clark streets and back to the Grand Pacific Hotel. During the march, the paraders passed through the Palmer House and the Tremont House and past Battery D and the Leland Hotel, where the headquarters of other delegations were established. At each of these places they were greeted cordially, while loud cheers marked their progress along the streets. The parading men, with their Allison banners, presented a fine appearance, and were "generally admired for their excellent marching".

It was not until the afternoon of the third day of the convention that the nomination of candidates began. First the name of Walter Q. Gresham of Indiana was presented by the Illinois delegation, and

this was followed by the action of Indiana in putting forward Benjamin Harrison. At three forty-five o'clock the roll call proceeded and Iowa was called. Amidst loud cheering, W. P. Hepburn took the platform and for about half an hour he was the center of attraction. After praising the Republican party, he stated that his State had instructed him to place before the convention the name of William B. Allison. The mention of Allison's name was the signal for a demonstration. The Iowa delegation stood, while there was loud cheering in the galleries as well as on the floor.

After this interruption, Hepburn proceeded to point out that Iowa had not once in thirty-four years wavered in its support of Republicanism. He praised the record of Allison which was written in the national legislation for the past quarter of a century. Continued cheering greeted his assertion that Allison would not be found returning rebel flags. Allison, declared Hepburn, would not usurp legislative functions "by a reckless and wanton use of the veto power", nor would he be guilty of urging home rule for Ireland and at the same time consent to the disfranchisement of six hundred thousand American citizens by keeping the Territory of Dakota out of the Union. If nominated and elected, Allison would be "true to country and the principles of our party", said Hepburn, in the conclusion of his speech.

When Hepburn had finished there was loud cheer-

ing for several minutes led by the Iowans, who were joined by delegates from Maryland and the Territories. The roll call then proceeded and other candidates were presented to the convention before adjournment for the day.

On the morning of June 22, 1888, the fourth day of the convention, the balloting began. On the first ballot thirteen men received votes, the highest number going to John Sherman of Ohio. Next came Walter Q. Gresham of Indiana, followed in order by Chauncey M. Depew of New York, R. A. Alger of Michigan, Benjamin Harrison of Indiana, and William B. Allison of Iowa who received seventy-two votes. His chief support came from Iowa, Rhode Island, and Tennessee, but he received scattering support from thirteen other delegations. Two additional ballots were taken that day, Allison receiving seventy-five and eighty-eight votes respectively.

The balloting was resumed on the following morning but without any decisive result. On the fourth ballot Allison again received eighty-eight votes, but on the fifth his total mounted to ninety-nine. It was evident that the deadlock would continue so the convention adjourned until four o'clock in the afternoon, but as it was Saturday balloting was not resumed and further action was deferred until the following Monday.

Immediately after the adjournment at noon on June 23rd, a meeting of representatives of the vari-

ous delegations was called in a room adjoining the convention hall to see if they could agree on a candidate. Senator George F. Hoar was present with authority from the Massachusetts delegation to support either Allison or Harrison. Clarkson of Iowa was present to support Allison, while the representatives of the Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Illinois delegations were authorized to support any candidate whom they saw fit. Other representatives promised that the delegations from their States would abide by the decision of the conference. The New York delegation had promised to support any candidate agreed upon by their delegates at large — Thomas C. Platt, Warner Miller, Frank Hiscock, and Chauncey M. Depew.

At the conference several names were discussed and then Senator Hoar made an earnest plea for the selection of Allison. Finally it was agreed by the representatives present that their States would vote for Allison, but the promise of New York to do so hinged on securing the consent of Depew who was not present at the meeting. No one doubted that he would agree, and all felt, when the meeting ended, that Allison would be nominated.

But shortly before the convention was to resume business another meeting was called to make certain that there would be no obstruction of the plans. To the consternation of all, the New York representatives announced that they could not fulfill their promise to deliver the New York delegation to Alli-

son because Depew would not consent to it. Depew, who had withdrawn from the race, took the attitude that his failure to secure more support in the convention had been due to the opposition of the agrarian element led by Iowa. He was president of the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad and for this reason was regarded with hostility by the agricultural interests which were reputed to be Allison's strongest backers.

It was plainly evident that Depew was nettled by his failure to secure the nomination and that he was determined to avenge himself at the expense of Allison. While he yielded to the anti-railroad group so far as to withdraw from the race himself, "he would not so far submit to such an unreasonable and socialistic sentiment as to give his consent that it should dictate a candidate for the Republican Party". This determination proved to be fatal for Allison's hopes. Had New York supported him, he would also have secured the votes of California, Iowa, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and perhaps Missouri — enough to assure him of the nomination.

When the seventh ballot was taken on Monday morning, June 25th, it was evident that the nomination of Allison was hopeless. He received only seventy-six votes while Harrison received two hundred and seventy-eight, Sherman two hundred and thirty-one, Alger one hundred and twenty, and Gresham ninety-one. The Iowa delegation realized

the uselessness of prolonging the contest, so after the seventh ballot had been concluded, David B. Henderson secured the floor and withdrew Allison's name. This was a signal for various delegations to cast their votes for Harrison who, on the eighth ballot, received five hundred and forty-four votes — more than the required majority.

Allison's defeat in 1888 did not cause him to give up the hope of being President. As the election of 1896 approached, sentiment began to develop in favor of him as a candidate for the Republican nomination. A great impetus was given to the Allison boom by the Republican State Convention which met in Des Moines on March 11, 1896. It was an enthusiastic Allison convention from beginning to end.

History repeated itself on this occasion, for Jonathan P. Dolliver was again the temporary chairman and again delivered the keynote speech as he had eight years before. For over an hour he spoke amid frequent applause in praise of Allison and his record. In conclusion, he said:

“No man has been proposed for the nomination whose election would not bring honor to the chief office of the people, but among all the illustrious men who are presented for the favor of the party in this year of hope and victory, not one outranks in ripened preparation for its duties, the unassuming leader of republicanism in Iowa, whose name is on the lips and in the hearts of all our people to-day.”

Following the permanent organization of the convention the resolutions committee brought in its report, formally presenting Allison to the Republican party of the country as a candidate for the presidential nomination. His long record and demonstrated ability were dwelt upon, and his acquaintance with the tariff, financial matters, and foreign affairs was especially stressed. The resolutions concluded: "Strong in every mental, moral and personal quality, strong in his industry and capacity to labor, strong in his firmness and conscientiousness of opinion, strong in his freedom from extremes and sectionalism, strong in a long record of unerring judgment as to public measures, strong in his universal reputation for conservatism and soundness and safety, the republicans of Iowa present him to the party and the nation as the ideal candidate." On the motion of Governor Francis M. Drake that the resolutions be adopted unanimously, everyone in the hall arose and "the cheers that rang throughout the convention hall were gigantic in magnitude."

But the enthusiasm shown for Allison in Iowa was not duplicated in other States. Sentiment throughout the Republican party crystallized rapidly in favor of William McKinley of Ohio. On May 4, 1896, the McKinley headquarters issued a statement claiming five hundred and five delegates, with only four hundred and fifty-six necessary for the nomination.

In spite of the claims of the McKinley forces,

Allison refused to withdraw and his name was presented to the National Republican Convention at St. Louis on June 18, 1896, by John N. Baldwin of Council Bluffs. Only one ballot was necessary, for McKinley received six hundred and sixty-one and a half votes. Thomas B. Reed of Maine received eighty-three and a half votes, M. S. Quay of Pennsylvania sixty-one and a half votes, Levi P. Morton of New York fifty-five votes, while Allison was last with thirty-five and a half votes. This defeat ended Allison's hopes of becoming President of the United States.

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