

Comment by the Editor

THE PRESIDENTIAL PARADE

Presidential visits and presidential campaigns are always exciting. Iowans took an intense interest in the presidential campaigns of 1840 and 1844, but their territorial status prevented participation in those heated contests. Just a century ago, in 1848, when Iowans first voted for a president, not one of the three candidates — Lewis Cass, Zachary Taylor, or Martin Van Buren — entered the Hawkeye State. In contrast, in 1948, all three major presidential aspirants as well as their running mates have visited Iowa.

The first chief executive to come to Iowa was ex-President Millard Fillmore who boarded the steamboat *Golden Era* at Rock Island in 1854 to make the Grand Excursion to St. Paul. President Fillmore spoke on internal improvements and the great West at Davenport and also gave a brief talk at Dubuque. Aside from Fillmore, no president or ex-president visited Iowa until after the Civil War. Zachary Taylor and Abraham Lincoln both were in Iowa before they achieved the presidency.

Ten of the last fifteen presidents since Andrew

Johnson have paid one or more visits to Iowa — all of them during their term of office. Ulysses S. Grant was in Iowa on several occasions, but his speech delivered to the "Army of the Tennessee" at Des Moines on September 29, 1875, caused nation-wide comment. "Let us all labor to add all needful guarantees for the more perfect security of Free Thought, Free Speech, a Free Press, Pure Morals, unfettered Religious Sentiment, and of Equal Rights and Privileges to all men irrespective of Nationality, Color or Religion. Encourage free schools and resolve that not one dollar of money appropriated to their support, no matter how raised, shall be appropriated to the support of any sectarian school. Resolve that either the state or Nation, or both combined, shall support institutions of learning sufficient to afford to every child growing up in the land the opportunity of a good common school education, unmixed with sectarian, pagan or atheistical tenets. Leave the matter of religion to the family circle, the church and the private school supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the church and state forever separate. With these safeguards I believe the battles which created us 'the Army of the Tennessee' will not have been fought in vain." (*Palimpsest*, 6:409-421.)

The next three presidents following Grant

(Hayes, Garfield, and Arthur) apparently did not visit Iowa. On October 12, 1887, Grover Cleveland and his beautiful wife saw the famous Sioux City Corn Palace. After marveling at the prodigal resources of the Northwest, Cleveland declared the Sioux City Corn Palace was the "first new thing" he had seen on his trip.

President Benjamin Harrison, at the Ottumwa Coal Palace on October 9, 1890, expressed delight at the things of beauty made of familiar materials. "If I should attempt to interpret the lesson of this afternoon," President Harrison declared, "I should say that it was an illustration of how much that is artistic and graceful is to be found in the common things of life and if I should make an application of the lesson it would be to suggest that we might profitably carry into all our homes and into all neighborly intercourse the same transforming spirit."

The next four presidents — William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson — journeyed to Iowa on a number of occasions. Harding stumped Iowa prior to his election; Coolidge seems to have missed the Hawkeye State. In 1928, eighty years after Iowans first voted for a president, citizens of the Hawkeye State cast ballots for Herbert Hoover, a native of Iowa, and the first and only

man born west of the Mississippi to be elected president of the United States. Herbert Hoover visited Iowa both as a candidate and as president.

Possibly the most dramatic presidential visit occurred on September 3, 1936, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt met his chief political adversary, Governor Alfred M. Landon of Kansas, in a drought conference at Des Moines attended by a number of Midwestern governors. During a heated political campaign, Roosevelt and Landon dropped politics long enough to study the plight of the farmer. It was the only meeting of two presidential candidates in Iowa and probably one of the few times in American history that two aspirants for the position of chief executive met for joint discussion during a campaign.

American history, as well as Iowa history, can be linked with the coming of presidents to Iowa. McKinley, for example, was testing Iowa sentiment on annexation of the Philippines; preparedness and the League of Nations prompted Woodrow Wilson to visit the Hawkeye State. In every instance our presidents have received a warm and respectful welcome.

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