

The Stampede From General Weaver in the Republican Convention of 1875

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J. B. Weaver

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THE STAMPEDE FROM GENERAL WEAVER IN THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION OF 1875.

BY JAMES S. CLARKSON.

I was a type setter on my father's paper, the Brookville, Ind., *American*, established by him in 1832, when I was ten years old and until I was fourteen, and used to go with him when he would take Henry Clay, Tom Corwin and other great Whig orators in Indiana. They would come to Brookville and stay at our house, (when I learned much of my early politics from them), and he would take them on their speaking tours. I also went with him in 1852 when I was ten years old, to visit Henry Clay at Lexington, Ky., where I saw a slave auction, which made me an abolitionist and led me to organize a club to support the Free Soil candidate of 1852, and this I shall mark the beginning of my career.

I will answer your inquiry¹ frankly and you are at liberty to use my letter as you shall see fit, publicly or privately, now or at any time hereafter. For I am in hearty sympathy with your patriotic desire to see that all Iowa men of distinction, living or dead, and of all parties and of all faiths, are given the benefit of all that is due them while there yet are living witnesses to give testimony from their own knowledge and belief as to the actual facts concerning them. Indeed I have sometimes felt that I should in my hours of leisure here on the farm gather out of the old *Register* files the different lengthy sketches which I have at various times written of several eminent Iowans, among them as I remember them, sketches of Senator Allison, Henry Clay Dean,

¹This article is adapted from correspondence.—Ed.

General G. M. Dodge, Judge N. M. Hubbard, Lysander W. Babbitt, Senator Dolliver, Rev. Thomas S. Berry, General J. M. Tuttle, John W. Chapman, John H. Gear, Samuel M. Clark, Frank Hatton, Charles Aldrich, Father Clarkson, Thomas W. Clagett, Henry C. Leighton, Judge Edward Johnstone, Enoch W. Eastman, Mrs. Amelia Bloomer, Mrs. Annie Wittenmeyer, and perhaps as many or more others whose names I cannot just now recall, and revise them up to date, and add sketches of as many more of their co-workers, whom I knew so well, and print them in a book as my contribution to the history of Iowa, and as material for future historians to draw upon. For the best and most comprehensive and accurate histories of all states and nations are written in the personal histories of the works and careers of their leading creative and constructive men and women. If I had only been true to my own impulse and good intention in my early youth, and had kept an industrious and faithful diary as the years passed between 1855,—when I was thirteen years old and leaving my place as a printer in my father's newspaper at Brookville, Ind., and going with him to help make Melrose Farm in Iowa,—up to the present time, I would love to go back to Des Moines and spend three or four years writing a history of Iowa. For, coming into the State, in the morning of its life, and before it had any railroads or many people or yet much of anything else, I really saw the State made, and in the years that followed 1855 personally knew not only thousands or tens of thousands but hundreds of thousands of its people, and practically all of its leading men and women, and so could tell much from my own knowledge that would interest all the Iowans to come. But, like too many other people of good intentions, I put it off until it was too late. Now the best I could possibly do would be to make a book of sketches of those among the real builders and makers of Iowa whom I knew best. If I shall ever do it the work will include men and women of all parties. For in the love I learned to have for Iowa and its people in the ten years I was on a frontier farm, I never, even in my most partisan days, could fail to recog-

nize and praise any unusual merit in a Democrat as quickly and as fully as in a Republican. To me always any man in Iowa showing forth great worth or great ability, was an Iowa man first and a Republican or a Democrat second.

If I do write any more of these sketches I shall include a larger share of those chosen as the subjects from among the many noble and useful women who have at all stages in its history served and graced Iowa with rare intelligence and devotion. In my opinion, speaking from my very wide acquaintance with the people of the State, with both men and women, the women of Iowa have always been more intelligent and more alive to the best interests of the State than the men. This was true of the women of the pioneer days, the splendid, lovable, devoted women, who largely furnished the courage as well as the patience to bear the hardships of the early days, and of all the women of the later periods—the women constantly leading and inspiring the State in its upward trend into greater and finer things and higher ideals, largely by furnishing to the public schools, which were the making of Iowa, the greater number of the teachers, and incessantly supplementing this by introducing and popularizing everything that would inspire and refine the people and ennoble the State. The women of Des Moines were always superior to the men in all the higher and better things that helped to form the character of the city, and to inspire it constantly forward to greater things. Of all the States in the Union, Iowa should have been first in adopting woman suffrage. For ever since I have known the people of Iowa, its women have been fully as competent to discharge all the duties of suffrage and citizenship as the men. It should do it now as speedily as possible, and when it shall have done it, I want to go on record here as predicting that it will quickly be delivered from the uncertain and excitable politics it has had for a dozen years, and return once more to one of the best-poised as well as one of the most progressive States in the Union.

I have always felt a sense of duty that I should have something on record as to my remembrance and understand-

ing of the reasons and causes for "the stampede nomination" of ex-Governor Kirkwood over General Weaver for governor in the Republican State Convention in 1875. I have felt this sense even more strongly since the General's death. For I felt then, and have felt ever since, that he was treated unjustly at that time, and given ample provocation for the course that he afterwards took. I have always believed, too, that the unjust action of that Convention caused in the end as much of loss to the Republican party as it did to General Weaver. For at that time he was already one of the two or three strongest men in mental force, debating power and popular influence in the Republican party in Iowa; and if he had been given the nomination for Governor then, for which he had an unquestionable majority of the delegates when the Convention met, he would have been elected, would have made a strong and popular Governor, and would almost surely have been afterwards elected United States Senator and would have made such a great career in the Senate, as a parliamentary leader and debater as to have added greatly even to the great power and renown which Iowa, through its unusually able men in Congress between 1861 and until about 1908 enjoyed—a renown and a power which were equalled by no other delegation in Congress except that of the State of Maine.

But to return to the State Convention that with a majority of delegates elected to nominate General Weaver for Governor, ignored the instructions of the people who elected them and nominated ex-Governor Kirkwood instead. I cannot at this distance from the event remember clearly all the details. But I do remember the main facts, that the Convention met in the time when the temperance question and the fight on the saloons was very acute and the feeling on the contest growing very bitter, and when the controversy over the control of corporations was also becoming one of the main political issues in the State. The Betty Stewart crusade of praying women in Ohio, with the bands of women going into the saloons to pray, was then at its height, and the saloon-keepers and their friends were strongly fearing that the crusade might extend into our State. General Weaver

had made a remarkable campaign upon the people for Governor, and with perfect fearlessness had aligned himself with the elements which were demanding the vigorous control or entire suppression of the saloons, and the public control of the railways and other semi-public corporations. With his strength with these two elements, and with his popularity among his comrades of the Union army, and his good record in the offices he had previously held, he fairly won a majority of the delegates to the State Convention. This was plainly apparent when the Convention met. When the leaders who were opposed to him on account of his attitude as to the corporations and the saloons, as well as the leaders who were in favor of the other candidates for Governor, found he was going to be nominated, unless some strong new feature or issue, or some new and stronger man, could be introduced on the scene, there was much of canvassing all night long the night before the Convention met, to devise a winning plan and accomplish Weaver's overthrow. The most active and earnest spirits in this were the liquor or saloon people, all of whom wanted to defeat the General. The corporation people were also nearly all opposed to him, but not nearly so earnestly nor so unanimously as the saloon element. Various ideas and methods were suggested and discussed, among them a proposition to nominate General G. M. Dodge, Iowa's leading and most popular soldier, and always so popular all over the State that he could have been nominated for Governor or any other office any year, if he would have accepted. But General Dodge did not want any office, and was busy building railroads; and besides he was a comrade and a strong personal friend of General Weaver's, and would not have accepted a nomination over him in an unfair way, even if he had wanted the office. It was after the failure to enlist General Dodge that the saloon people began to turn to Kirkwood, and yet morning came without any regular programme having been reached to present his name or to work the stampede from Weaver.

The Convention met in Moore's old opera house or hall, with the house so crowded that several of the delegations had to be seated on the stage. There was much gossip and specu-

lation among the delegates as to what was to be done, and the whole Convention was plainly nervous and expectant of something sensational going to happen. There was no chosen leader to take charge of the Kirkwood boom, or to openly antagonize the Weaver majority. Suddenly one of the smallest counties, Audubon, and not a saloon county, presented the name of Kirkwood by casting its vote for him, and as Audubon was at the head of the alphabet in the roll call, this brought on the expected sensation at once. Instantly the Convention grew greatly excited, and all the delegations from the different counties began to discuss the matter. The Dubuque delegation was seated on the stage, and was plainly the most excited and apparently the most surprised of all the delegations. It had a hurried consultation, and then one of its members, General Trumbull, as I remember it, left the delegation and walked clear down to the front of the stage, and leaning over the foot-lights and pointing his hand at the Audubon delegation, which sat in the parquette not far from the stage, demanded to know "by what authority is the name of Governor Kirkwood presented?" Then arose in the Audubon delegation the veteran, Mr. Ballou, tall, grey, impressive, and looking as one of "the prophets of old," and in a voice of peculiar power and magnetism, thundered back, "By the authority of the great Republican party of the State of Iowa." The climax had come, the tornado was on, and swept everything before it. The anti-prohibition and pro-corporation delegates went with it, but I believed then, and believe now, that their action was the wisdom of instantly utilizing a way opened to them in a time of great need, and not the wisdom of having originated the movement. The Convention in its highly wrought condition and excitement was hypnotized, as so many large popular bodies frequently are, and enough of General Weaver's delegates were swept off their feet and carried along by the storm to furnish the votes needed to make a majority for Kirkwood—and the great prize that General Weaver had so ardently coveted, and had so clearly and honestly won from the people themselves, was swept out of his hands and his whole course in life changed.

Before the next day had come, and the spell was over, many of those who had helped to do it, deeply regretted it, and would have undone it if they could.

But history took its inexorable way, and Kirkwood was elected Governor, then United States Senator, and then tempted out of the Senate into the Cabinet of a President who was killed in the first year of his term, and thus was suddenly returned to private life, a disappointed man, while General Weaver in vindication of his self-respect, was compelled to leave the Republican party, and was welcomed to the leadership of a new national party, in which he afterwards achieved great distinction, and became its candidate for President, demonstrated remarkable strength and influence as a national leader and debater, and polled over a million votes and carried several States for President. He quickly became an impressive national figure and constantly added to the strength, credit and dignity of his party in the country at large; and by every title of proved worth and ability demonstrated his capacity and fitness for the high duties of the Presidential office.

I never could blame him for the course that he took, and I know that in the inner circles of the Republican party, and among fair men everywhere, this view was taken. It was a most serious sacrifice to him, for he had a nature which prized and treasured personal friendships as being really the sweeter things in human life, and the most of his friendships were among Republicans. His original aspirations were all within the party of his first choice. His illustrious career as a soldier, and the devotion to him of all Union soldiers but added to this. At different times and in different ways, but of course always without publicity, many of us in the Republican party sought to open the way for the self-respecting return of the General to the party. But the right way could never be opened; and besides the General once he had entered upon his new career of fighting the Republican party, because of its growing tendency no longer to keep human rights and human interests above all property rights and property interests, felt that it was his duty to stay at the new post in the new field.

It is to be said now, to the eternal credit of General Weaver that the main motives and desires of his life always were to serve his fellow man. Generously endowed by nature, in both mental and physical force, he could easily have won fortune and success in several fields, in the business world, or in his profession as a lawyer, and surely have gained all that the most of men most covet in life. When the call of duty came, however, and he became convinced that the government was drifting into the control of the special interests and the privileged classes, and from Lincoln's ideal of a "government of the people, by the people, for the people," he did not hesitate to make the sacrifice and give up all his personal ambitions and go to the defence of the people. Then he became one of the forerunners, and I think the greatest of them all, in the great popular movement to resist this tendency to make our Republic a government of money, by money, for money, and not of men, which is now nation-wide, and so valiantly led by Roosevelt and other gallant spirits following on these higher paths where Weaver led. Millions of fair men who opposed the General then, and honestly thought him visionary or seeking personal power and renown through new and untenable issues, find it a pleasing duty to themselves to do him justice now.

In national circles I know that in all the later years of General Weaver's life there grew to be among all Republicans of candor and breadth only the kindest feeling and respect for him, and among many of them this feeling deepened into affection. I personally know that two Republican presidents desired and proposed to appoint him to some of the high national or international commissions, both to secure the services of his great and unquestioned ability, and as a final and conspicuous compliment that as soldier and statesman he deserved from the Republic. They were only prevented from doing this by the protests of some narrow Republicans in official places, men incapable from their own deficiencies of appreciating either the actual greatness of the General's character and ability, or the nobility of his nature. I have no doubt that this desire to do justice to General Weaver in his later years, and to testify in every way to the esteem and affection in which his fellow citizens held him, was particularly true of the people of Iowa also. He was among Iowa's great-

er men, and honored the State even more than it honored him. His name will be held in both the State and the nation in increasing pride and admiration as the years shall pass.

THE BURLINGTON TRAGEDY.

We noticed yesterday the murder of Mr. Bradstreet, at Burlington, Iowa. The sensation at Burlington, as we then stated, on account of this occurrence, was extreme. A town meeting was called at the Methodist Church, and although the evening appointed for it was very inclement, 300 persons attended it; and unanimously passed, among others, the following resolutions:

Resolved, That we will not countenance the wearing of concealed arms at home, and that we consider the practice unchristian, ungentlemanly, and in the highest degree reprehensible.

Resolved, That we deeply deplore the dreadful affray which occurred on Monday evening last, between Mr. J. P. Bradstreet and Mr. W. G. Ross, and which has resulted in the death of the former, as an outrage upon society, and upon the character of our town.

Resolved, That in that transaction Mr. Bradstreet acted altogether upon the defensive, and that no other course was left him to obey the natural impulse of self defence.

Resolved, That the instigators of this bloody tragedy and foul murder, and the counsellors, secret and open, of Mr. Ross, be requested to leave this town and territory, as soon as possible.

The following paper was then presented read, and unanimously approved by the meeting:

In consequence of the lamentable circumstance which occurred yesterday in our city, which occasioned the death of one of our citizens, Mr. J. P. Bradstreet, we, the undersigned citizens, do hereby agree to close the doors of the several business houses with which we are connected (either as merchants or clerks) on tomorrow, 13th inst., and suspend business operations from 10 a. m. to 4 p. m., and place on the doors of each of our stores, a badge of mourning, and as far as possible, attend the funeral services and burial of the deceased above named.

We like such meetings and such resolutions. It is the readiest and best way of frowning down the *infamous* practice of carrying concealed weapons—of taking an enemy unawares, and of committing an act of cowardly assassination upon him.—Boston (Mass.) *Quarto Notion*, May 7, 1842.

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