

# Genealogy

## The Clarksons of Indiana and Iowa

*Leland L. Sage\**

Indiana's contributions to Iowa have been numerous and frequently of high quality. Professor William O. Lynch many years ago wrote of "The Flow of Colonists to and from Indiana before the Civil War."<sup>1</sup> He found that the census of 1850, taken just four years after Iowa's admission into the Union, gave 19,925 as the number of Hoosier colonists who had settled there; the census of 1860 gave for the same category 57,555, an astounding increase of some 37,000. Only the state of Illinois had drawn more Hoosiers than Iowa and only the state of Ohio exceeded Indiana as the contributor to the growth of Iowa in this decade.<sup>2</sup>

If this mass of 37,000 could be redeemed from anonymity there would be found in it the sternly positive personality of a certain Coker Fifield Clarkson, late of Brookville, Franklin County, Indiana. Beside him would be found Elizabeth Cole-scott Clarkson, his second wife and devoted mother to his children by his first wife, Elizabeth Goudie Clarkson, namely: Pamela, Frances, Richard Perkinhon, and James Sullivan. All but the last-named came to Melrose Township, Grundy County, Iowa, in 1855; he, the youngest, for some reason remained a time in Indiana and then made the trip alone in February, 1856, to join his family. The father had made some name for himself in Indiana as an editor and Whig leader; he and his sons were to become notable figures in Iowa history as journalists, Republicans, and leaders in the economic, cultural, and moral life of the state. James Sullivan Clarkson graduated into the ranks of national leaders of his party and ultimately became an elder statesman and an adviser of presidents. This article is chiefly concerned with these three men.

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<sup>1</sup> William O. Lynch, "The Flow of Colonists to and from Indiana before the Civil War," *Indiana Magazine of History* (Bloomington, 1905- ), XI (1915), 1-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6; *Compendium of the Seventh United States Census, 1850*, pp. 116-118; *Population, Eighth United States Census, 1860*, pp. 616-618.

Coker Fifield Clarkson<sup>3</sup> (1811-1890), the Hoosier who became a Hawkeye as if to the prairie born, had a career of several phases which contributes much to the theory that in the development of American culture "the wind blew from the East." He was born a down-easter in the Penobscot country<sup>4</sup> and might well have grown up to be a seafaring man from Maine or a journalist devoted to the promotion of the political fortunes of James G. Blaine, who actually in later days was one of the household gods in the Clarkson family and who corresponded with and visited in the home of his son James. On the testimony of this son James we have it that Coker F. Clarkson "loved his birthplace and kept on his tongue always the brogue of the broad a's, o's and r's of the Yankee, and every day of his long life in heart and prayer were loving thoughts of Maine."<sup>5</sup>

The first phase of his career is that set of forces which we delight to call Heredity and in this case might well be conjured up as The Best of English Middle Class History. Son James was so impressed with this hereditary factor that in 1891 he made a trip to England especially for the purpose of tracing the family name as found in parish records, rent rolls, cemeteries, and all other possible sources. If we cannot accept unreservedly the ecstatic conclusions reached by this ancestor-worshiper who traced the family not only back to the Norman Conquest but to an even earlier day, we may allow as justifiable his finding that "the one notable thing in the whole career of the name has been a love of writing and letters. Its very name originated itself or was evolved out of

<sup>3</sup> Fred E. Haynes, "Coker Fifield Clarkson," *Dictionary of American Biography* (20 vols., New York, 1943), IV, 164-165.

<sup>4</sup> As to his exact birthplace, we cannot be sure. He gave it as Frankfort, Maine, in a letter to Charles F. Goodwin, Brookville, Indiana, n.d. This letter, now in the possession of John P. Goodwin, who kindly lent it and other materials to the author, was published in the Brookville *Indiana American*, August 21, 28, 1952. Coker Clarkson's son, James S., gave it as Dixmont, Maine, in his memorial essay, "Coker Fifield Clarkson," in Dorus M. Fox, ed., *The History of Political Parties, National Reminiscences and the Tippecanoe Movement* (Des Moines, 1895), 287, 292. One of Coker's long-time associates who knew the family intimately for many years gave it as Frankfort, Maine; see Cyrenus Cole, "Father Clarkson," *The Midland Monthly* (Des Moines, 1894-1899), I (1894), 62. The uncertainty about his birthplace may well be understood in view of the fact that his parents distributed the birth of seven children among six different places in New England before migrating to Indiana.

<sup>5</sup> Clarkson, "Coker Fifield Clarkson," *History of Political Parties*, 306.

Saxon terms. . . . In the early day a secretary or clerk was called a clark, and a *clark's son* easily became Clarkson, which is undoubtedly the origin of the name."<sup>6</sup>

James S. Clarkson, the genealogist of his family, was always eager to claim the name of the famous British abolitionist, Thomas Clarkson (1760-1840), as a forebear, and to rhapsodize over Playford Hall, Thomas' home, as if it were an ancestral seat of the family. This is claiming too much. We may admit him as a collateral member of the line but no more. Thomas Clarkson was the son of a Reverend John Clarkson who kept a free grammar school at Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, England.<sup>7</sup> According to the tradition handed down to Coker Fifield and from him to others, the American branch of the family traces back to a seventeenth century Clarkson who left Wisbech for Cornwall; two generations later a son, Richard, came to America as a volunteer member of the forces of Sir Henry Clinton. He was wounded in the third and victorious charge made against our men at Bunker Hill; after a period of invalidism he was returned to Britain where shortly he fell in love with a Miss Olivia Perkinhon. Now a bit of old-fashioned romance enters into the story. Olivia was the daughter of a family of some wealth and station who disapproved of her match with the patriotic but probably impecunious soldier. The couple lived up to all the reader's expectations: they eloped and married and came to America. Their first permanent home was in New Hampshire and here their first child was born, a son named Richard Perkinhon in spite of the refusal of the Perkinhons to forgive their headstrong daughter. Four daughters were also born to this union but they do not enter into this story.

There were other Clarksons who came to America but this Richard Perkinhon, born October 2, 1782, at Stratham near Exeter, New Hampshire, was the first of this particular line of American-born Clarksons. He grew up as a farm worker and a tailor. It could not be said of him that he did not try to find a place for himself in the New England environment.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 291-295. In G. F. Russell Barker, "Thomas Clarkson," *Dictionary of National Biography* (63 vols., New York and London, 1885-1900), X, 454-457, the name of this town is given as "Wisbeach." A letter from the Town Clerk of Wisbech assures me that Thomas Clarkson is accepted as a native of this town and that a statue and appropriate plaque mark his birthplace. N. C. Dewick to author, November 25, 1952. Playford Hall is near Ipswich, in Suffolk.

He worked for some time as a laborer in his home county and then pursued his tailor's trade at Portsmouth, at Brentwood, and at Haverhill, all in New Hampshire; then he tried out Frankfort, and next, Dixmont, Maine. In 1803 he married Mary Simpson of Brentwood, the daughter of William and Mary Defenthon Simpson, both of Irish stock and of the finest character, according to the memory of Coker F. Clarkson, who knew them during his boyhood. To this union there were born seven children, including Coker in 1811, before the parents decided to seek another and more hospitable climate. The unrelenting Maine winter, which lasted for twenty-four consecutive months in 1817 and 1818, forced the decision. In 1819, the father came West alone and for reasons not known to us, settled upon Franklin County, Indiana, as his future home. He put in a crop in 1820 and then sent for his family. The brave mother and her brood of seven came as far as Wheeling, Virginia, with the nine-year-old Coker driving the team every mile of the way. At Wheeling, they were met by the father; the entire trip from Maine to Indiana consumed sixty-six days.<sup>8</sup>

Now begins another phase of Richard P. Clarkson's career: life on the Indiana frontier. His family seems to have had a normal existence. For some years he rented land, first one place and then another, until 1828 when he bought a farm near Mt. Carmel. He was a tremendous man—he weighed 220 pounds—and was known far and wide for his feats of weight-lifting. He was said to have been able to lift a weight of 1400 pounds without the aid of straps or any other artificial devices. His eldest daughter, Pamela, married a prosperous young farmer, Joseph Goudie,<sup>9</sup> a son of James Goudie, a prominent politician who was for several terms speaker of the Indiana House of Representatives.

As for young Coker, he seemed to have inherited some of his father's strength as well as an interest in letters and politics. In addition to the usual farm work at home and for the neighbors he worked in the slack seasons as a laborer on the Miami Canal and whatever he could save went into the family treasury for the purpose of buying a farm, which was

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<sup>8</sup> Clarkson, "Coker Fifield Clarkson," *History of Political Parties*, 291-292, 287.

<sup>9</sup> August J. Riefels, *History of Franklin County, Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1915), 1027.

done in 1828. But farming was not enough in this young man's life; the Clarkson urge to write could not be resisted. In 1838 he asked for his freedom and was given it; soon he was apprenticed to a printer-publisher named Milton Gregg, in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. All he had of material goods was fifty cents in cash and a suit of blue jeans. In two years he was the editor and in three, the sole owner of the Lawrenceburg *Western Statesman*. In one more year he had won the hand of Elizabeth Goudie, the sister of his brother-in-law, Joseph Goudie, and yet one more year and he had purchased the paper in his home town of Brookville and converted it into *The Indiana American*, probably the most gratifying accomplishment of his entire career.<sup>10</sup>

An enduring success rewarded his efforts. Financially he prospered from the earnings of his press and paper and from a farm which he operated on the side. Brookville too had prospered in spite of the vicissitudes of the Whitewater Canal days. It was just three years after Coker F. Clarkson returned to Brookville that the building of the canal was begun; in three years more the link with Lawrenceburg had been made. But the difficulties were far greater than the moments of success and by 1852 the canal's promoters gave up the struggle against nature and the railroad.<sup>11</sup>

These years, 1836 to 1852, are the very period when Clarkson was most active as an editor and as a political power who wanted nothing for himself but a great deal for his fellow-citizens. Brookville was a "second capital" of the state and he could not have been much better placed for political journalism. As an active and zealous Whig he voted for Henry Clay in 1832 and spent much time as his regional campaign manager and tour conductor. He reluctantly switched from Clay to General William Henry Harrison in 1836, feeling that Clay could never bring success to the party. He helped to nominate Harrison again for the 1840 campaign that proved to be so memorable. He entertained General Harrison in his home and helped to direct the canvass in the Western states and might later have claimed a reward had he been interested in that angle of politics.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Clarkson, "Coker Fifield Clarkson," *History of Political Parties*, 288, 296.

<sup>11</sup> Bernhard Knollenberg, "Pioneer Sketches of the Whitewater Valley," *Indiana Historical Society Publications* (Indianapolis, 1895-), XV (1945), 108-115.

<sup>12</sup> Clarkson, "Coker Fifield Clarkson," *History of Political Parties*, 296-299.

Coker F. Clarkson we would call a self-taught and a self-made man. In his Brookville days he knew more or less well all the great Whig leaders of the 1830's and 1840's; as an editor and an active correspondent seeking out the talent of the times he had contacts with many of the literary lights of the country. He not only survived these tests but came through with honors. We can only marvel at his wide knowledge and his powers of succinct expression. He himself attributed much of his education to his work as a printer at the case and he saw to it that both his sons were well-grounded in the printer's trade.

Meanwhile, home and church life had not been neglected. Four children were born to him and Elizabeth Goudie: Pamela, Frances, Richard Perkinhon (1840), and James Sullivan (1842). The town and countryside were full of the children's relatives. Their father's older sister, Pamela, wife of Goudie, had children who would be "double cousins" to them. Undoubtedly they were brought up in a strict regime. Their father had joined the Methodist Church in 1830 at the age of nineteen and remained a loyal member, almost a zealot, until his death in 1890. But we cannot imagine him as one of the "shouting Methodists" so vividly described by R. Carlyle Buley<sup>13</sup> and certainly not among those despised by the Quakers, as related by Bernhard Knollenberg.<sup>14</sup> Of all the "causes" of the times, temperance (later prohibition) was Coker F. Clarkson's greatest love. He helped organize temperance societies all over Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois and eventually became Grand Worthy Chief Patriarch of the Sons of Temperance of the United States. Schuyler Colfax of South Bend, Neal Dow, and Edward C. Delevan, indeed, all the state and national leaders, were his intimate friends and associates in this work.<sup>15</sup>

For reasons that were only vaguely intimated, Coker Clarkson sold his paper in 1853 to the Rev. Thomas A. Goodwin. In his valedictory editorial he asserted that he had

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<sup>13</sup> R. Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1950), II, 447-461.

<sup>14</sup> Knollenberg, "Pioneer Sketches of the Whitewater Valley," *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, XV, 90-94.

<sup>15</sup> Clarkson, "Coker Fifield Clarkson," *History of Political Parties*, 301. For a description of the Indiana temperance movement, see Charles E. Canup, "Temperance Movements and Legislation in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XV (1920), 3-37, 112-151.

put out his weekly paper without a single break for twenty-two years and now he was glad to turn it over to someone else; there were many people who owed him money and he fervently hoped that they would come in and pay up because he was badly in need of the money.<sup>16</sup>

For a time he enjoyed his newly-found freedom. Notices from him or about him frequently appeared in the paper. He was an experimentalist in his farming and delighted in sharing his discoveries with others. A new type of honeycomb was a source of great joy; a highly productive apple tree was the occasion for a public notice inviting his friends and all others except commercial nursery men to come and get shoots from it for grafting. In 1854 he took part in a mass meeting called after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the kind of meeting that led to the formation of the Republican party.

In 1855 he exchanged this pleasant phase of his life for a renewal of pioneering.<sup>17</sup> From a beautiful and comfortable brick home, no doubt with all "modern conveniences," he took himself and his family to a tent home that was then the only habitation in the western part of Grundy County, Iowa; from the scenic beauties and varied landscapes of Franklin County, Indiana, they went to a prairie farm of unbroken vistas where the sun would beat down unrelentingly all summer and the winds would blow unceasingly all winter, and blizzards and prairie fires would be the deadliest enemies. Why would a man of forty-four give up such proved success for such risks? How could a man do it? Stranger still, how could his wife and children do it? One turns to the novels of Herbert Quick for at least a partial answer. In *Vandemark's Folly* and *The Hawkeye*<sup>18</sup> he deals with this theme and to some extent recaptures the mood of these pioneers. The Clarksons appear as actual historical figures in *The Hawkeye*; certainly acceptance of the authenticity of the characters of the book is made easier by familiarity with the saga of this family.

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<sup>16</sup> Brookville *Indiana American*, October 14, 1853.

<sup>17</sup> James S. Clarkson Papers, Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines, contain many references to the move to Iowa. (The James S. Clarkson Papers are divided: some are in the Iowa Department of History and Archives, Des Moines, and some in the Library of Congress.)

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Quick, *Vandemark's Folly* (Indianapolis, 1922) and *The Hawkeye* (Indianapolis, 1923).

Economically the family prospered. The renunciation of the public life and the return to farming seemed to be a definite and irrevocable decision. Melrose Farm soon became a landmark. Six hundred and sixty-four acres were entered; eventually a thousand acres of the best land in Iowa were theirs. As stated above, James stayed behind the others about a year and made the long trip from Brookville to Grundy County alone as a boy of fourteen, the last hundred-odd miles from Dubuque overland by whatever conveyance he could chance upon, this in February, usually the bitterest month in the Iowa winter. James joined his father not only in the usual farm work but in the operation of a section of the Underground Railroad, a fact about which he boasted the remainder of his life and which he recorded in *Who's Who in America*. The father was urged to accept election in 1856 to the Iowa State Constitutional Convention but refused because of his short length of residence in his newly adopted home. In 1860 he was elected to the Republican National Convention where he first supported John McLean of Ohio but switched to Lincoln on the third ballot and marched with the rail-splitters in triumphant procession.<sup>19</sup> This was the second president he helped to nominate. In October, 1861, his elder son Richard backed up the family's politics by going off to the wars, a member of Company A, 12th Iowa Infantry. Coker again yielded to the call for service and accepted election in 1863 to the state senate, a place which he held for one term of four years.

Some excerpts from one of his letters and one from James convey vividly the interests and outlook of the family:

"Melrose Farm, Feb. 9th, 1863

"My dear Sister, . . .

"The longer I live in Iowa the better I am pleased with the location I have made to spend the fast advancing years of my life. It is quiet, it is healthy—the atmosphere is invigorating. And farming is meeting my most sanguine expectations, notwithstanding the idea that we are so far from market, yet the difference in taxes, and the cost of

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<sup>19</sup> James S. Clarkson to Professor Frank I. Herriott, Drake University, June 6, 1907, Clarkson Papers, Des Moines. See also, Frank I. Herriott, "Iowa and the First Nomination of Abraham Lincoln," *Annals of Iowa* (Des Moines, 1893- ), VIII (1907-1908) 3d Series, 81-115, 186-220.



farms will more than make the difference. For instance last year I had rented out considerable of my farm, and my  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the wheat amounted to 7 bushels per acre. This at \$1.00 per bushel, which is the price here, is \$7 per acre, while the land on which it is raised is not worth more than \$5 per acre. The same with corn. For my  $\frac{1}{3}$  of corn I received 25 bushels per acre. This at 35 cents per bushel is over \$8 per acre. I do not know how farming can be made to pay as well in Indiana or Ohio.

"But I am not anxious about making much. I am so situated now that I am not fearful of poverty in the decrepitude of old age, which has sometimes been a horror to me. My farm will always yield me a comfortable living. More than this would add to me trouble and anxiety. Were it not for the terrible war raging in our country I should consider myself comfortably situated.

"Tell Mr. Goudie that I sold my beef cattle on the farm last fall at \$2 and \$2.50 per cwt. and I sold my hogs at \$3.50 to \$4.10 net. That was pretty good for cattle that lived on the prairies in the summer, and only on prairie (hay) during the winter. . . ."

"Melrose Farm, Iowa.

Sunday, Feb. 22nd, /63

"Dear Aunt—. . .

"There is not much news here to write, or at least, nothing that would interest you. Everything is mixed up with *war*, here as elsewhere. A large ratio of the population of this vicinity are in the army, consequently, there is a corresponding degree of interest and anxiety, among those left. And with all due respect which the people of Iowa entertain for other troops, yet it is natural for them to be proud of their own. Iowa troops have performed *their part* in this war, as their thinned ranks will to-day testify. Co. A, 12th Iowa, of which Richard is a member, was sworn into the U.S. Service, on the 18th of October, 1861, with ninety-four men. Today they have but thirty-one names on their roll, thirty-two of them are dead, eleven of them killed in action, and four died from their wounds.

"Father has got his barn about finished. It is the wonder of the whole community. The Yankees have always been used to farmers having small barns, about like *town people* have, in Hoosierdom.

"Market, for farm produce is *now* better than it has been here, for four years. We have now a railroad running within 24 miles of us—that is Chicago, Iowa & Nebraska RR. running south of us. The terminus of which is, at the present time, Marshalltown. The Dubuque and Pacific RR, is now within thirty-five miles of us. It is to be extended 40 miles next summer, as far as Iowa Falls in Hardin County, and will run 12 miles north of us. So you see, you can come within 12 miles of us, next fall, on the railroad, and if you will be there, I will be at the depot with a carriage, and with that span of gray horses I used to tell you about when I was a little white headed shaver, to fetch you down here instanter. Come.

"Wheat is worth now at the railroad, from .90 to \$1.10. Oats .40 Rye .65. Corn .15. Pork, nett, \$4. . . ."<sup>20</sup>

Coker F. Clarkson's love for the farm was not transmitted to his sons nor was it sufficient to contain all of his own boundless energy. Shortly after Richard had come home from the Civil War, both boys went packing off to Des Moines to work as journeymen printers for F. M. Mills and Company, publishers of the *Iowa State Register*. (The Mills family was also from Indiana.) The literary talent of young James soon asserted itself and he was able to go into reporting and editorial work and serve as string correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* and other papers. The father and two sons bought out the *Register* in 1870, thus beginning the final phase of Coker's life. He retained his farm and added the editorial supervision of the paper to his work.

Soon there developed what could have been a family tragedy, a split over politics. Iowa Republicans were badly divided by factionalism after the war. The father was devoted to the political interests of Senator James Harlan, formerly of Rockville, Indiana, a member of the class of 1848 at Indiana Asbury College, a strong Methodist lay leader, and an educator as well as politician. The sons took up with the newer faction led by General Grenville M. Dodge, Chief Engineer of the Union Pacific Railroad and now successfully

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<sup>20</sup> Coker F. Clarkson to Mrs. Joseph Goudie, February 9, 1863; James S. Clarkson to Mrs. Joseph Goudie, February 22, 1863. Both letters are now in the possession of John P. Goodwin, Brookville, Indiana.

backing the senatorial ambitions of ex-congressman William Boyd Allison of Dubuque. Fortunately for family harmony, the father sold out his interests to his sons<sup>21</sup> and James now became the real power in the *Register* and a kingpin in Iowa politics. Richard seemed quite content to manage the business side of the firm; the father relegated himself to the back page with a column on farming and soon became famous as "Father Clarkson," known throughout the state for his excellent advice on farming practices and the art of living as well. He also acted as a professional organizer for the Grange. He represents a little-known side of that movement, that of the successful and prosperous farmer and businessman who helped to organize the lodges as social and mildly political organizations which had little to do with the ultra-radical anti-monopoly wing that has given us the traditional view of "agrarian radicalism."<sup>22</sup> In 1878 he sold his beloved Melrose Farm and moved to Des Moines where he continued his column down to his death in 1890.

After 1871 the spotlight shifts to James, soon familiarly known far and wide by his pen name of "Ret," acquired by his habit of marking all his wretchedly handwritten copy with this abbreviation for "Return" of all copy to him for personal proofreading. Typesetters had to be paid bonus rates to get them to undertake the translation of his scrawl to cold type. Equally remarkable and far more important than his handwriting was the development of the range of his knowledge and the power of his personality. He was an omnivorous reader and he long retained his facts and illustrative material and drew easily and readily on the reserves of information which he stored up. He became a practical man of affairs as well and acted both as promoter and organizer of the companies that brought the C. B. & Q., the Northwestern, and the Wabash railways into Des Moines.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cole, "Father Clarkson," *Midland Monthly*, I, 65; F. M. Mills to Edgar R. Harlan, February 3, 1921, Charles Aldrich Collection, Iowa State Department of History and Archives; George Mills, "The Des Moines Register," *The Palimpsest* (Iowa City, 1920- ), XXX (1949), 283-289.

<sup>22</sup> On the Grange in Iowa see Mildred Throne, "The Grange in Iowa, 1868-1875," *Iowa Journal of History* (Iowa City, 1903- ), XLVII (1949), 289-324.

<sup>23</sup> James S. Clarkson to L. F. Andrews, October 15, 1907, Clarkson Papers, Des Moines. Clarkson was very proud of this contribution to the growth of Des Moines and rebuked Andrews severely for having attributed too much credit to other Des Moines men for these additions to the city's welfare.

He was a great force in the fight for statewide prohibition and helped to get two such acts through the legislature only to see the state supreme court nullify each one on technicalities.<sup>24</sup> He devoted himself to the improvement of the state's educational facilities and served on the board of the Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts.

But politics was James Clarkson's first love and the field of his greatest activity. Like his father before him, he wanted nothing for himself (at this stage) but had very firm notions of what was good for the people. He believed in the divine mission of the Republican Party and in Protection as its gospel. James G. Blaine was his idol and no revelations of irregular sales of railroad bonds ever swerved him from devotion to the man from Maine. Blaine visited him in his home in Des Moines and fully acknowledged his debt to him as his foremost Western spokesman and manager.<sup>25</sup>

In 1888 the exigencies of local politics plus the unavailability of Blaine made James Clarkson the manager of Senator William B. Allison's effort to secure the Republican nomination for president. He conducted a strenuous pre-convention campaign for Allison against such figures as John Sherman, Walter Q. Gresham, and Benjamin Harrison with Blaine's shadow always hovering over the field. When the convention met in one of the most open contests in Republican history it seemed that any one of the above named plus several lesser lights had a fighting chance to come off with the prize. The final result owed much to Ret Clarkson's surrender to pure sentiment—some would say maudlin sentimentalism. After seven futile ballots spread over several hectic days, he gave the word that shifted Iowa's votes from Allison to Harrison and started the Harrison bandwagon on the road to victory.

In later years he attributed his action to his love for old Hoosier friends, Louis T. Michener and William W. Dudley, Harrison's managers, and to his desire to fulfill his father's pledge of devotion to the Harrison family. Just as his father had helped to nominate William Henry Harrison in 1839, so

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<sup>24</sup> Dan E. Clark, "The History of Liquor Legislation in Iowa, 1846-1898," *Iowa Journal of History*, VI (1908), 55-87, 339-374, 503-608.

<sup>25</sup> James G. Blaine to Mrs. James S. Clarkson, January, 1885, Clarkson Papers, Library of Congress.

now his son could carry out his father's wish and help nominate old Tippecanoe's grandson. All of this he wrote to Michener as he described the feelings which had guided him in 1888.

"Sleepy Hollow Farm  
Tarrytown, N.Y., May 19, 1915

"My Dear Old Friend:

"You will never know how much good you did me in your good letters of April 26. They made me feel almost as if I had had a visit with you.

"Yes, I remember the conference you and I had in New York in 1888 a few weeks before the Repn Natl Convention of that year, and when we practically reached an understanding that my second choice would be Harrison and that your second choice would be Allison, although we made no positive agreement; but I always felt after that that if we could not nominate Allison I would be with you for Harrison. In a way our little visit then saved the final day for Harrison. For, with my liking for you and other Hoosiers, and my father's desire to have me support Harrison, I always felt throughout the long contest at Chicago, when there was so much pressure on me to favor Sherman—(particularly from his two brothers then living in Des Moines) and so kept the way open for that. After the last rally on Saturday, after we had balloted all week, and had failed to form a union on Allison,—which union came within a breath of accomplishment, and was defeated only by Chauncey Depew refusing to join the three others of the Big Four of the N.Y. delegation—and the Convention had met on Monday, Senator Hoar, of Massachusetts, came to me and said 'I think it is time some one gave way for the party.' I said I thought so too, and that I had a letter in my pocket from Allison authorizing me to withdraw his name whenever I thought it should be done, but that I would not do that unless we could get a majority of delegates pledged to some one before we made the new move. He asked me who I thought was the best man to unite upon, and I told him Harrison, and went on to tell why I thought so, and told him how much I believed you and Dudley and other Hoosiers had told me of Harrison that I believed, and then referred to my father's friendship for the Harrisons and spoke of how my father had gone on

horseback from Brookville over the Alleghenies to Harrisburg, Pa. in 1839 to help nominate the elder Harrison for 1840, and he exclaimed 'Why my father was a member of that Convention too, and if the Harrisons were good enough for the elder Clarksons and Hoars they were certainly good enough for the later ones.' So we finally agreed—although the Senator at first was pretty strongly inclined to Sherman, as they were kinsmen in some degree, and Sherman was very strong in New England, but we finally agreed we would go together. Then I said 'if you will canvass the Eastern delegations I will canvass the Western ones and if we get a majority of votes pledged I will withdraw Allison's name at the close of the next ballot, and announce that Iowa was going to support Harrison.'

"We made the canvass and after that and after consulting you and Dudley and finding how many votes you had pledged, found we had a majority for Harrison, and then proceeded to carry out our programme. My effective plea with the other delegates was that if we could get a majority of the delegates to go with us, Iowa would withdraw Allison and cast its vote for Harrison. As I was going back to my seat with the Iowa delegation, Senator Quay, who had seen us at work among the delegations over-took me and asked 'What are you and old man Hoar up to?' I told him, and he said it was impossible, and that we hadn't had time to get such an agreement with so many men. I told him that we had, and added, 'We have 18 votes pledged from your own State, headed by Oliver, and you had better get on the wagon.' But he wouldn't and stuck by Sherman. Senator Hoar, in his Autobiography, tells of how nearly we came to nominating Allison, but I do not remember if he tells our final work together for Harrison.

"This is my recollection of it. At Des Moines that night when the news of Harrison's nomination came a big crowd of *enthusiastic Allison* men were in front of the *Register* office and they were surprised and of course disappointed over Allison's defeat, and failed to cheer. My father was in the *Register* office, and seeing this, went out on the walk, and hired an express wagon, got into it, and had the driver drive him into the center of the crowd, and said: 'Gentlemen, I want to tell you that no mistake has been made in getting a good candidate for President. I have known the Harrisons

for over 50 years and I want to tell you the kind of men the Harrisons are,' and then he told them of his horseback ride to Harrisburg, and how he helped to nominate Harrison then, and of the part he and his paper, the *Indiana American*, took in the great campaign of 1840—and soon had the crowd cheering.

"My father in fact helped greatly in nominating three candidates for President. First Wm Henry Harrison, as I have stated; second, Abraham Lincoln for he was one of the Iowa delegates in the Chicago Convention in 1860, and one of the main organizers in forming the parade of the rail splitters which played so great a part in carrying the day for Lincoln; third, the younger Harrison, in the influence he had on me in the Convention at Chicago 28 years later. . . ."<sup>26</sup>

The remainder of the story is anticlimax and in many ways a study in frustration. Half a loaf is poor compensation when one feels entitled to a whole loaf and that well buttered and sweetened. Ret's old habit of self-denial was no longer his mood. He wanted and expected a cabinet place as a reward for his key votes in the convention and for his valiant work as virtual campaign manager carried out in great difficulty due to a siege of sickness. After many conferences and a strained relation with Senator Allison, who was playing a very cagey game for himself, Clarkson ended up with a place as First Assistant Postmaster General in charge of patronage, with John Wanamaker as the Postmaster General. Clarkson soon acquired an unsavory reputation for his extreme spoilsmanship, although it must be asserted that he played the game just like his predecessors and successors, Republicans and Democrats alike.<sup>27</sup>

Now he decided to give up the editor's chair at the *Register* and make his home in the East. This was a momentous decision and was protested by many of his friends. A long study of his papers and some insight into his character leaves this writer with the conviction that Clarkson thought he had outgrown Des Moines and Iowa and was ready to conquer new worlds. Unfortunately this did not prove to be the case. He served two years as chairman of the National

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<sup>26</sup> James S. Clarkson to Louis T. Michener, May 19, 1915, Michener Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Ganfield Fowler, *The Cabinet Politician* (New York, 1943), 210-215.

Committee, 1890-1892, but this was routine work. He opened the Tenth Republican National Convention in 1892.<sup>28</sup> He was president of the National Republican League, at best an empty honor. In 1892 he suffered a severe attack of rheumatism and while recuperating at Asheville, North Carolina, was the butt of a strange and unexpected denunciation by Senator Allison, creating a breach which was never fully healed. He accepted Allison's apologies and acted as his manager in the campaign for the nomination in 1896 but rather half-heartedly. Perhaps he sensed the futility of it in view of Mark Hanna's masterly campaign for William McKinley.

In the meanwhile he had to take up other work. He became the president of a bridge construction company which had a contract for a bridge across the Hudson River. He divided his time between Philadelphia and New York. In 1899 he was reduced to the point of being a candidate for a job as sergeant-at-arms in the United States Senate and failed to get even this small plum. In 1900 some of his old friends made an effort to get for him the post of Secretary of the Senate and again failed. This failure he felt quite sure was due to the apathy of Senator Allison who denied the charge. In 1902 his friends tried one more possibility and finally succeeded: President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him to the post of Surveyor of Customs for the Port of New York.<sup>29</sup>

From this vantage point he again became a man of some power and of considerable influence in the councils of the party. He seems to have been a personal favorite with President Roosevelt and was a frequent guest at the White House. Among other accomplishments was his introduction and sponsoring of an interesting Hoosier-Hawkeye, Leigh Smith James Hunt, who had made a fortune in Korean gold-mining and Sudanese cotton plantations. Hunt was probably one of those who planted the notion of an African big game hunt in Roosevelt's head and certainly was one who gave expert information to the planners of the trip. A fortunate investment by Clarkson in Hunt's Korean mining company

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<sup>28</sup> *Proceedings of the Tenth Republican National Convention, 1892*, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan P. Dolliver to James S. Clarkson, April 12, 1902, T. C. Platt to James S. Clarkson, April 17, 1902, Clarkson Papers, Library of Congress.



provided a large portion of his income during these and later years.<sup>30</sup>

In the meanwhile Richard Perkinhon Clarkson had taken over the editorship as well as the publisher's office in the *Register*. The paper had built up so much momentum under Ret that it could carry on for years as the leading paper of the state. R. P. Clarkson, as he was known, was a man of the finest character and highest ideals and firmest will imaginable but he lacked the sparkle of Ret's literary style and he suffered from an air of reserve brought on by deafness. After running the paper since 1888 he finally brought himself to part with it in 1902 by selling to a syndicate headed by George E. Roberts of Fort Dodge, Director of the United States Mint. For a short while he held a sinecure as Pension Agent for Iowa and Nebraska until his death in 1905.<sup>31</sup>

Ret held on as Surveyor until 1908 and then retired to a small farm near Tarrytown, New York. Here he and his wife, Anna Howell Clarkson, lived with their son, Coker Fifield Clarkson and his wife, Lucy Miller Corkhill Clarkson, granddaughter of Justice Samuel Freeman Miller, and their daughter, Olivia, on whom he doted in the best grandfatherly fashion.

In these years he had little to do except take pride in the success of his three sons and to while away the time in letter-writing and occasional flings at feature stories for the *Register*. He seemed content to live on in the lives of his children. All had been educated in the best Eastern schools and had made good in the world of business and government service. Occasionally he toyed with the idea of taking on a newspaper but he and his son, Grosvenor, his prospective associate, never received just the right offer.<sup>32</sup> In 1917 he

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<sup>30</sup> There are dozens of letters between Clarkson and Hunt in the two collections of Clarkson papers. In one letter, August 29, 1892, Hunt tells Clarkson that his holdings in the Hunt mining companies total \$392,000.

<sup>31</sup> The Richard P. Clarkson Scrapbook contains many clippings and letters anent the passing of this member of the Clarkson family. The scrapbook was kindly put at the author's disposal by Clarkson's granddaughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Clarkson Zwart Metcalf. See also the *Des Moines Register and Leader*, May 7, 1905; *Annals of Iowa*, VII (1905-1907) 3d Series, 315-316.

<sup>32</sup> James S. Clarkson to Louis T. Michener, December 14, 1909, Clarkson Papers, Library of Congress.

and Mrs. Clarkson happily celebrated their golden wedding anniversary; on May 31, 1918, Ret passed away while visiting at the home of his son, Harold, in Newark, New Jersey.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> New York *Times*, December 27, 1917, June 1, 2, 3, 1918.