

# INDIANA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY

VOLUME LVIII

JUNE 1962

NUMBER 2

---

## Was the Nomination of Wendell Willkie a Political Miracle?

*Hugh Ross\**

Biographers have concurred in the judgment of contemporary politicians and pundits that the 1940 Republican presidential nomination went to the colorful political amateur from Indiana as the result of a "Miracle in Philadelphia."<sup>1</sup> Willkie had not won any pledged delegates in the presidential preferential primaries or in the Republican state conventions held in the spring of 1940. One friendly biographer wrote that less than two weeks before the Republicans assembled in Philadelphia Willkie "did not possess the pledge of a single state delegation."<sup>2</sup> And the *New Republic* in its convention post-mortem explaining "How They Won with Willkie," asserted that when Willkie arrived in Philadelphia "his delegate strength could have been mustered in a medium-sized hotel room."<sup>3</sup> But insufficient investigation has been made of the interim period between the naming of the last delegate during the final week of May and the opening of the Republican national convention on June 24, 1940. There is

---

\* Hugh Ross is a member of the faculty in the Department of History at the College of San Mateo, San Mateo, California.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Barnes, *Willkie* (New York, 1952); chap. xi is entitled "Miracle in Philadelphia." Eugene H. Roseboom, *A History of Presidential Elections* (New York, 1957), 460-465, uses the chapter subtitle of "The Philadelphia Miracle" to describe Willkie's nomination. Arthur Krock in the *New York Times*, October 10, 1944, stresses Willkie's political naivety and lack of organization. See also Mary Earhart Dillon, *Wendell Willkie* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1952), 121-176; Donald Bruce Johnson, *The Republican Party and Wendell Willkie* (Urbana, Ill., 1960), 74-108; Roscoe Drummond, "Wendell Willkie: A Study in Courage," *The Aspirin Age*, ed. by Isabel Leighton (New York, 1949), 458.

<sup>2</sup> Dillon, *Willkie*, 136.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Mitchell, "How They Won with Willkie," *New Republic*, CIII (July 8, 1940), 49.

considerable evidence which suggests that during these first three weeks in June, Willkie gathered enough reliable promises of delegate votes to make him one of the leading contenders for the Republican presidential nomination before the first roll call of the states. The Willkie weapon of victory was fashioned in the weeks immediately preceding the convention balloting as fragments of many delegations coalesced to form the wave which crested at Philadelphia. Where did the Willkie votes come from and why did they go to Willkie?

The two leading Republican presidential contenders in the spring of 1940 were Senator Robert A. Taft, of Ohio, and Thomas E. Dewey, district attorney of New York County. Taft had served in the Senate for less than two years. Dewey, narrowly defeated for the governorship of New York in 1938, had never held an elective office on the state or national level. That these two comparative newcomers to politics were the pick of the candidate crop was testimony to the severity of the shrinking pains suffered by the Republican party during the 1930's.

Dewey and Taft had conducted sharply contrasting campaigns. From January, when Dewey issued his first campaign statement on foreign policy, until June, when he delivered a convention-eve radio address over a national network, the dynamic New Yorker had been on the prowl across the land. Taft, on the other hand, had been a weekend warrior, pleading that he could not in good conscience desert his desk while the Senate was in session. Dewey had swept through five spring primaries without a check.<sup>4</sup> Taft relied for his convention strength on a network of understandings he had reached with professional politicians scattered throughout the South and Middle West.<sup>5</sup>

Under the unwritten rules governing Republican presidential campaigning, which appeared in 1940 to have been drawn for a noncontact sport, Dewey and Taft had not met head-on in a single primary. Dewey had defeated Senator Arthur Vandenberg, of Michigan, decisively in the Wisconsin

---

<sup>4</sup> *Milwaukee Journal*, April 3, 1940; *Omaha Evening World Herald*, April 11, 1940; *Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1940; *Baltimore Sun*, May 7, 1940; *Newark Evening News*, May 22, 1940.

<sup>5</sup> By 1940 the heyday of the presidential preferential primary was over. Less than half of the one thousand Republican delegates were chosen by the primary method. *New York Times*, February 18, July 14, 1940.

and Nebraska primaries, but the New Yorker's name had appeared alone on the ballot in Illinois, Maryland, and New Jersey. Taft, for his part, had entered only the primary in Ohio, where he was unopposed. Republican voters had not had an opportunity to choose between Dewey and Taft in a presidential preference primary. As a consequence, each of the front runners had in his train a number of camp followers whose loyalty, at best, was only first-ballot deep.<sup>6</sup> Dewey, the acknowledged leader in pledged delegates, was particularly vulnerable to raids because few of his followers were attached to his cause by strong bonds of either personal or political loyalty. And far more than any specific candidate, the minority Republicans were desperately searching for one who could bring the party back to the White House after an absence of eight years.

If the world had been at peace, the probability is that either Dewey or Taft would have been the 1940 Republican presidential candidate. But events in Europe in the spring of 1940 influenced the course of domestic politics in the United States. When France fell and England tottered, the inexperience of Dewey and the isolationism of Taft persuaded many voters to cast about for a new candidate. Dewey was the principal loser. The Gallup Poll of April 23, 1940, recorded the high water mark of Dewey's popularity. As the Nazi tanks streamed across France, and England lay under the shadow of invasion, Dewey's popularity steadily waned.<sup>7</sup> This state of affairs was tailor-made for the appearance of the forceful Wendell Willkie, who was more experienced as an executive than Dewey and more international-minded than Taft.

The first leakage in Dewey's pledged delegate strength began, however, in his own New York delegation several weeks before the European crisis and the emergence of Wendell Willkie as a serious presidential contender. It sprang

---

<sup>6</sup> Of the 448 delegates chosen by the primary method, only the twenty-four Dewey delegates from Wisconsin and the fifty-two Taft delegates from Ohio voted as a unit for more than one ballot. *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-second Republican National Convention* (Washington, D.C., 1940), 279-320.

<sup>7</sup> Dewey's popularity with Republican voters declined from his being favored by 67 per cent (April 23) to 29 per cent (June 25). Willkie rose from 3 per cent (April 23) to 44 per cent (June 25). During the spring of 1940, Taft's popularity ranged from a high of 16 per cent (May 16) to a low of 8 per cent (June 11). Hadley Cantril (ed.), *Public Opinion, 1935-1946* (Princeton, N.J., 1951), 610.

from a feud between Dewey and Kenneth F. Simpson, Republican national committeeman from New York. Dewey had broken publicly with Simpson, his original political mentor, after hard feelings developed during Dewey's unsuccessful run for the New York governorship in 1938.<sup>8</sup> Dewey decided to drive Simpson from power in the Republican state organization and replace him with one of his own lieutenants.<sup>9</sup> In April, 1940, emboldened by unexpectedly easy victories in the Wisconsin, Illinois, and Nebraska primaries, the Dewey forces moved to consolidate their position in control of the New York State Republican Committee.<sup>10</sup>

If Willkie had not rocketed into national political prominence in May, Dewey's determination to force a showdown with Simpson might have tightened his hold over the New York delegation. But when the Dewey high command finally ousted Simpson as national committeeman a scant two weeks before the Republican national convention assembled, Willkie was in the field as an announced presidential candidate actively gathering delegates.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Simpson still exercised a decisive influence over some twenty delegates from New York City from his secure command post as Republican chairman of New York County (Manhattan). Simpson prepared to lead his loyal followers into the Willkie camp on an early ballot, after first honoring a prior commitment to vote for Frank Gannett, publisher of a string of upstate New York newspapers, on the first ballot.<sup>12</sup>

The harsh treatment meted out to Simpson further sapped Dewey's New York strength because it alienated the Gannett delegates from the Mohawk Valley. In contrast to the bare-knuckle assault on Simpson, the Dewey managers had handled the ephemeral presidential candidacy of Frank Gannett with kid gloves. Dewey had sought to avoid a two-front war in his home state by allotting Gannett several votes from the New York delegation in the expectation that the publisher would release them after one or two ballots.<sup>13</sup> The Dewey

---

<sup>8</sup> Warren Moscow, *Politics in the Empire State* (New York, 1948), 77.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* See also *New York Times*, May 19, December 17, 1939, February 3, 21, 1940.

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, April 12, 1940.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, June 13, 1940.

<sup>12</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, June 28, 1940; *New York Times*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>13</sup> *New York Times*, February 3, 1940.

organization, therefore, was shocked on the first day of the national convention when Mayor Rolland B. Marvin, of Syracuse, the leader of the Gannett bloc, announced his "sincere belief that Wendell L. Willkie is best equipped to be the Republican standard bearer in these critical times."<sup>14</sup> With the Simpson dissidents from Manhattan on the loose and the Gannett delegates from upstate moving to join the stop-Dewey front, the New York County District Attorney had lost control of one-third of the New York delegation before the balloting began.<sup>15</sup> Dewey was in deep trouble in his own state.

Willkie was also the beneficiary of an intraparty split in New Jersey. Through no fault of his own, Dewey suffered a serious setback in the gubernatorial primary between former Governor Harold Hoffman and State Senator Robert Hendrickson. The latter piled up his winning margin over Hoffman in Essex County, where the political organization supporting Hendrickson was also strong for Dewey. So bitter were many of Hoffman's followers over his defeat that they were eager to retaliate against Hendrickson by opposing Dewey's bid for the presidency.<sup>16</sup>

In the New Jersey presidential preference primary, Dewey rolled up 340,000 votes, while Willkie received some 25,000 votes as a write-in candidate.<sup>17</sup> But the national convention delegates were not under a legal obligation to vote for the primary winner.<sup>18</sup> While the entire New Jersey delegation was nominally pledged to Dewey, a number of them were openly hostile to the candidacy of the New Yorker, and others were lukewarm in their support. Several of the delegates elected on the Dewey ticket promptly announced that they did not regard themselves as bound to vote for the primary winner even on the first ballot. At the initial meeting of the New Jersey delegation, observers estimated that one-third of its members intended to vote for Willkie.<sup>19</sup>

Friction between the Republican organization leaders in New Jersey committed to Dewey and the rebels determined

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Newark Evening News*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, May 31, 1940; *Newark Evening News*, May 27, 1940.

<sup>18</sup> *Newark Evening News*, May 27, 29, 1940.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, May 29, 1940.

to bolt to Willkie mounted during the month between the primary and the national convention. The Dewey leaders in New Jersey were so uncertain of their support that they neither polled the delegation nor sought at any time to invoke the unit rule for fear the defection might become epidemic.<sup>20</sup> As the Republicans began to arrive in Philadelphia, Lloyd B. Marsh, of Passaic, who had backed Hoffman in the gubernatorial primary, proclaimed his willingness to serve as a Willkie floor leader. This declaration of open warfare between the Hendrickson and Hoffman factions raised to twelve the number of firm Willkie first ballot votes from New Jersey.<sup>21</sup>

Willkie, however, did not rely entirely upon the windfall of votes which he had not had to work for. On the weekend preceding the New Jersey primary, he had attended a reception in his honor at Somerville.<sup>22</sup> Willkie followed up this brief foray in mid-June with his first direct personal canvass for delegates on a whirlwind tour through Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.<sup>23</sup>

New England was promising territory for a Willkie safari, because it was a land of favorite sons who had rebuffed both Dewey and Taft. In the initial presidential preference primary of 1940, New Hampshire Republicans had approved a slate pledged to Senator Styles Bridges as a favorite son.<sup>24</sup> Maine followed suit in April, selecting a delegation leaning toward Bridges.<sup>25</sup> A weak bid by Dewey supporters was turned back in Massachusetts, where a delegation expected to plump for Representative Joseph Martin was chosen.<sup>26</sup> In Rhode Island, an incipient Dewey movement led by an avowed opponent of the state administration was soundly trounced in the Republican state convention by the organization of Governor William Vanderbilt.<sup>27</sup> The Republican state convention in Connecticut similarly ignored pressure from

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, June 25, 1940.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, May 20, 1940.

<sup>23</sup> Dillon, *Willkie*, 136-137; Johnson, *Republican Party and Wendell Willkie*, 69.

<sup>24</sup> *Concord Daily Monitor*, March 13, 1940.

<sup>25</sup> *Bangor Daily News*, April 5, 1940.

<sup>26</sup> *Boston Herald*, May 1, 1940.

<sup>27</sup> *Providence Journal*, April 30, 1940.

the national candidates and swung in behind Governor Raymond Baldwin.<sup>28</sup> Tiny Vermont also named a group unpledged to any of the national candidates.<sup>29</sup>

Willkie's preconvention peregrination into New England yielded an encouraging number of reliable offers of delegate support. Speaking from the same platform, Governor William Vanderbilt, of Rhode Island, announced his personal endorsement of Willkie's candidacy, thus assuring the Hoosier a foothold in that delegation.<sup>30</sup> Senator Styles Bridges, of New Hampshire, listened sympathetically to the case for Willkie and promised to deliver his bundle of favorite-son votes to the Hoosier on an early ballot.<sup>31</sup> Governor Raymond Baldwin, of Connecticut, was so favorably impressed that he agreed to lead his favorite-son delegation to Willkie on the second ballot.<sup>32</sup>

Willkie astutely focused his fire on Massachusetts, the lodestar of the New England galaxy. Not only did the Bay State control thirty-four votes, the largest single bloc of votes in the region, but also she influenced political thinking in the smaller adjacent states. Representative Joseph Martin, soon to preside over the Republican national convention as its permanent chairman, had a lien on the Massachusetts vote as a favorite son. But Willkie chalked up a signal personal triumph by persuading a number of influential politicians in the state that he was the candidate capable of leading the Republicans back to national political ascendancy in 1940. Such powerful Massachusetts politicians as Governor Leverett Saltonstall, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Christian Herter, speaker of the lower house of the general court, and National Committeeman Sinclair Weeks were reported in Willkie's corner.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> *Hartford Times*, May 15, 1940.

<sup>29</sup> *Montpelier Evening News*, May 24, 1940.

<sup>30</sup> *Providence Journal*, June 16, 1940. Vanderbilt's decision to back Willkie probably kept the Rhode Island delegation out of the Taft camp as a unit. *Ibid.*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>31</sup> Dillon, *Willkie*, 136. Half of New Hampshire's eight votes went to Willkie on the third ballot when Bridges released them. If left free of instructions, the New Hampshire delegates would probably have split between Taft and Hoover. *Concord Daily Monitor*, June 28, 1940.

<sup>32</sup> On the day before the national convention began, Baldwin agreed to cast all of his state's votes for Willkie on the first ballot. *Hartford Times*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>33</sup> The W. E. Mullins column in the *Boston Herald*, June 24-27, 1940, contains a detailed analysis of the growth of Willkie sentiment in the Massachusetts delegation.

So impressed was Sinclair Weeks with Willkie that, shortly before the national convention, he undertook a difficult mission to Washington in which he sought to persuade Representative Martin to resign as permanent chairman of the national convention, release the Massachusetts delegation from its pledge to him, and nominate Wendell Willkie himself. Martin refused.<sup>34</sup> Willkie's meteoric rise, however, had cost Martin the convention loyalty of his own delegation. Despite direct orders from the House Republican minority leader to stand firm, the majority of the Massachusetts delegation had decided to switch to Willkie after casting a complimentary ballot for Martin on one or two roll calls. On convention eve a close observer of Massachusetts politics accurately estimated that at least twenty-five of the state's thirty-four delegates were anxious to slip the leash and answer the call of Willkie. He predicted that by the fourth ballot "those among the 34 delegates who will not be counted for him" could be counted "on the fingers of one hand."<sup>35</sup>

With the addition of the votes from Massachusetts, Willkie had assurances of approximately two-thirds of the eighty-eight votes from New England by the third ballot. But the energetic Indianan received additional accessions of voting strength from the East during the period just prior to the balloting. On the first day of the national convention a band of fourteen pro-Willkie delegates from western Pennsylvania caucused and announced plans to switch from Governor Arthur James to Willkie on an early ballot.<sup>36</sup> Farther south, in Maryland, former Governor Harry Nice, the "boss" of the delegation, revealed that Dewey could not count on unanimous support beyond the first ballot despite his unopposed victory in the primary. An informal poll of the Maryland delegates disclosed that a majority had decided to leave Dewey for Willkie.<sup>37</sup> West Virginia's national committeeman, Walter J. Hallanan, a dedicated Willkie booster, did extensive missionary work among his state's convention representatives.<sup>38</sup> Tiny Delaware adapted to the regional

---

<sup>34</sup> Joseph W. Martin, Jr., "The Greatest Convention Ever: I Remember Willkie," *Saturday Evening Post*, July 9, 1960, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> W. E. Mullins, *Boston Herald*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond P. Brandt, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 24, 1940; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 28, 1940.

<sup>37</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>38</sup> *Charleston Gazette*, June 27, 1940.



trend, voting at a convention caucus to add half of her six votes to the Willkie total.<sup>39</sup>

As the above survey indicates, a viable bloc of Willkie delegates took shape during the month preceding the convention in an area composed of twelve eastern states.<sup>40</sup> Willkie sentiment in the industrial East and New England was more genuine and spontaneous than in other portions of the nation. If a sectional fuse had not been lit and carefully tended, there would probably have been no national explosion for Willkie. The Willkie movement, however, became national in scope as the shock waves spread west from the impact area. Although the nutrients present in the political soil of the Middle West provided more natural nourishment for the isolationism of Senator Taft than the internationalism of Willkie, the latter's managers began to harvest a crop of convention votes during the days immediately preceding the balloting. By the time the convention assembled, Willkie had infiltrated several of the delegations from the Middle West previously shared by Dewey and Taft or held in the name of a favorite son.

Missouri was typical of the uncommitted middle western delegations. Skeptical Republicans there regarded Taft as lusterless and Dewey as an upstart. Because neither of the two leading candidates possessed broad appeal to political groups in Missouri, no serious attempt had been made to obtain an instructed delegation at the state convention. When the Willkie men made their move late in the spring, the field was open to them. The Willkie prenomination drive in Missouri was directed by Edgar M. Queeny, president of the Monsanto Chemical Company of St. Louis, a prototype of the businessman who entered politics actively for the first time as an enthusiastic Willkie booster. Since his previous contact with the political process had been limited to a campaign contribution in the disastrous Landon campaign, Queeny wisely enlisted the aid of a number of rising young professionals who were eager to challenge Old Guard domination of the regular Republican organization. Queeny and his allies proselytized so energetically that when the Republicans

---

<sup>39</sup> *Journal Every Evening* (Wilmington), June 26, 1940.

<sup>40</sup> Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland.

gathered in Philadelphia, an estimated twenty of Missouri's thirty votes were earmarked for Willkie.<sup>41</sup>

Elsewhere in the Middle West, Willkie's lieutenants were able to establish preconvention beachheads in the pivotal states of Indiana, Illinois, and Minnesota. Support from Indiana was considered vital to Willkie's success because of the American political shibboleth that a national candidate must have the confidence of his home state. But Willkie's prospects in Indiana were apparently less bright than in New England and in such eastern states as New York and New Jersey. The Indiana delegation to the 1940 Republican national convention contained a number of veteran politicians, including former Republican National Chairman Will Hays, former Senator James E. Watson, former Governor James P. Goodrich, labor leader William L. Hutcheson, and Homer Capehart, a successful businessman who would go to the Senate several years later. As a political reporter close to the delegation put it, these men were "not likely to be influenced by the fact that Willkie was born in Indiana, attended I.[ndiana] U.[niversity] and has strong ties in the state." "If a considerable number of them decide to vote for Willkie it will be because they believe he is the man of the hour."<sup>42</sup>

Not only were a majority of the Indiana delegation not yet decided to vote for their state's native son but some of them were openly hostile. Former Senator James E. Watson, for example, was said to have compared Willkie to a reformed prostitute who wanted to lead the choir immediately after joining the church.<sup>43</sup> Two Indiana congressmen, Forest Harness and George W. Gillie, were among those active in the stop-Willkie movement, which culminated in a meeting attended by more than forty members of Congress.<sup>44</sup> There were even two Indiana votes pledged to Senator Styles Bridges, of New Hampshire, as reward for support of Raymond E. Willis in his unsuccessful 1938 race against Democratic Senator Frederick Van Nuys. On the other hand, Willkie could count on the support of National Committeeman William G. Irwin and Representative Charles A. Halleck. Before the

---

<sup>41</sup> Curtis A. Betts, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 28, 1940.

<sup>42</sup> Maurice Early, "The Day in Indiana," *Indianapolis Star*, June 23, 1940.

<sup>43</sup> Dillon, *Willkie*, 143.

<sup>44</sup> *New York Times*, June 25, 1940; *Des Moines Register*, June 25, 1940.

balloting began, an able political reporter for the *Indianapolis Star* predicted eight Indiana votes for Willkie on the first roll call.<sup>45</sup> Under the circumstances, this tally was an encouraging beginning.

Neighboring Illinois was nominally for Dewey as the unopposed winner of the state's presidential preference primary. But a motion to bind the Illinois delegation to the New Yorker was tabled at a caucus. Despite the urgings of the *Chicago Tribune* to remain firm, Dewey sentiment in Illinois remained thin and unemotional.<sup>46</sup> Minnesota moved hesitatingly out of the ranks of the uncommitted when Governor Harold Stassen, ambitious and anxious to back a winner, agreed to serve as Willkie's floor leader after he had completed his keynoting assignment. Stassen's decision to back Willkie was important. Minnesota had been regarded as a stronghold of midwestern isolationists to whom the internationalist Wendell Willkie was anathema.<sup>47</sup>

The inroads made by Willkie forces into the Missouri, Indiana, Illinois, and Minnesota delegations before the balloting began were of special regional political significance. With the exceptions of Wisconsin and Michigan, which were pledged to Dewey and Senator Arthur Vandenberg respectively, Republican delegations from the Middle West in the preconvention period had been either openly for Taft or ready to go to him after fulfilling their commitments to favorite sons. Iowa would vote for Hanford MacNider on the first ballot.<sup>48</sup> Kansas was nominally committed to her senior senator, Arthur Capper, although the key figure in the delegation was former Governor Alfred M. Landon.<sup>49</sup> South Dakota would pay her respects to her Governor Harlan Bushfield before shifting to one of the national contenders.<sup>50</sup> Until the unexpected emergence of Willkie, the Taft managers had been content to wait, secure in the belief that these votes would gravitate of their own accord to the Ohio Senator. But by the time the Republican convention opened, the Taft leaders could not be sure where the favorite-son vote of the Middle West

---

<sup>45</sup> Maurice Early, "The Day in Indiana," *Indianapolis Star*, June 27, 1940.

<sup>46</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, June 24, 26, 1940.

<sup>47</sup> *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 24, 26, 1940.

<sup>48</sup> *Des Moines Register*, June 28, 1940.

<sup>49</sup> *Emporia Gazette*, April 8, 1940.

<sup>50</sup> *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader*, June 28, 1940.

might go after the first ballot. Wisconsin's Governor Julius Heil was openly at work trying to persuade his delegation to renege on its presumably firm commitment to Dewey.<sup>51</sup> Nebraska was already debating what course to follow after a first ballot vote for Dewey.<sup>52</sup> All over the Middle West, delegates were either moving toward Willkie or having serious doubts about the wisdom of acrrying out their original intention of voting for Taft. The Willkie votes from Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Minnesota appeared as portents of even worse to come for the once confident Taftites from the Middle West.

In comparison with the Middle West, the concentric circles radiating out from Willkie's centers of strength in the East lost much of their force when they reached the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Coast. Even in these none too friendly areas, however, Willkie had firm assurances of both primary and secondary support from several delegations. Arizona caucused shortly after arrival at Philadelphia and decided to switch from Gannett to Willkie on the third ballot.<sup>53</sup> Colorado's Governor Ralph Carr, who had been scheduled to give a seconding speech for Senator Taft, followed the lead of his good friend, Governor Raymond Baldwin, of Connecticut, into the Willkie camp.<sup>54</sup> Individual delegates from New Mexico and Nevada shifted to Willkie before the balloting began.<sup>55</sup> Oregon remained loyal to Senator Charles McNary, but the Oregon delegation received an urgent message from Governor Charles Sprague pleading for Willkie support on a later ballot on the grounds that Dewey was "altogether too unseasoned" and Taft was "too colorless."<sup>56</sup> The big California delegation lacked cohesion beyond a sentimental attachment to Herbert Hoover and was seen by one correspondent "as playing the role of the young lady with a handful of suitors."<sup>57</sup> As in the Middle West, the appearance

---

<sup>51</sup> Madison *Capital Times*, June 26, 1940.

<sup>52</sup> Omaha *Evening World Herald*, June 28, 1940.

<sup>53</sup> Phoenix *Arizona Republic*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>54</sup> Hartford *Times*, June 25, 1940. A number of the Colorado delegates refused to follow Carr. Denver *Rocky Mountain News*, June 26, 1940.

<sup>55</sup> Albuquerque *Journal*, June 28, 1940; Reno *Evening Gazette*, June 24, 1940.

<sup>56</sup> Portland *Oregonian*, June 26, 1940.

<sup>57</sup> Los Angeles *Times*, June 24, 1940.

of Wendell Willkie had shaken old political alignments in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast area and offered an attractive alternative for those delegates who had been unenthusiastic about both Dewey and Taft.

The pocket delegations of the South proved to be least susceptible to temptation. The Willkie drive made little impression on the states of the deep South. Only in three states of the Upper South—North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia—were there any Willkie converts in the immediate pre-convention period.<sup>58</sup> Taft and Dewey continued to lead Willkie by wide margins south of the Mason-Dixon line as the time for balloting arrived. Southern Republicans may have been more attached to the basic philosophy of traditional Republicanism than their northern brethren. Certainly the southern delegations were more tightly controlled by the organization leaders, and individual southern delegates were less able to vote their personal convictions than were their colleagues from other sections.

The salient fact which emerges, however, from the above review is that Wendell Willkie had passed well beyond the dark horse stage when the formal balloting began and, in terms of convention votes, was one of the serious contenders for the Republican presidential nomination. More than many of its predecessors, the Republican national convention of 1940 was truly a nominating body in the sense that its choice was not predetermined.

There was no controlling force operating on the uncommitted delegations to give them direction and purpose before the rise of Willkie to national political prominence during late May and early June of 1940. If the uncommitted delegations had been confronted with the choice of voting for Dewey or Taft, after the favorite sons had dropped out, the selection, in many instances, would have been one of political necessity rather than conscience. The sudden and dramatic appearance of Wendell Willkie as a new attraction in Republican politics did not, therefore, compel most delegates to sever themselves from long cherished and deeply-felt political principles before they voted for him.

---

<sup>58</sup> Raleigh, N.C., *News and Observer*, June 25, 1940; Nashville *Banner*, June 24, 1940; Norfolk *Virginian-Pilot*, June 27, 1940.

The more closely one examines the balance of political power on the eve of the national convention, the fewer are the surprises in the voting behavior of the delegates during the six roll calls (see Table I) required before Wendell Willkie obtained a clear majority. The distinctive pattern of sectional sentiment which so strikingly manifested itself during the period between the naming of the last of the delegates and the opening of the convention held true to form throughout the balloting and formed the mold of the Willkie victory. For this reason, the direction of the voting can best be charted through a regional analysis.<sup>59</sup>

TABLE I  
BALLOTING AT THE 1940 REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

	First Ballot	Second Ballot	Third Ballot	Fourth Ballot	Fifth Ballot
Dewey	360	338	315	250	57
Taft	189	203	212	254	377
Willkie	105	171	259	306	429
Vandenberg	76	73	72	61	42
James	74	66	59	56	50
Martin	44	26	0	0	0
MacNider	34	34	28	26	4
Gannett	33	30	11	4	1
Bridges	28	9	1	1	0
Capper	18	18	0	0	0
Hoover	17	21	32	31	20
McNary	13	10	10	8	9
Bushfield	9	0	0	0	0
LaGuardia	0	1	0	0	0

In the twelve-state eastern region, as shown by Table II, Dewey went to the fore on the first ballot.<sup>60</sup> His lead, however, was markedly less than his managers had confidently

<sup>59</sup> For purposes of this analysis, the nation has been divided into four regional groupings of twelve states each. The East has been considered as composed of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia; the Middle West as Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri; the West as Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, Nevada, Idaho, California, Washington, Oregon; the South as Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas. The 1,000 national convention votes were distributed as follows: East, 322; Middle West, 322; West, 152; South, 191. The remaining thirteen votes were cast by the territories. A simple majority of 501 was required to nominate.

<sup>60</sup> Voting figures have been compiled from the *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-second Republican National Convention*, 279-320.

predicted. Defections from Dewey were apparent from the first ballot onward and his losses, with rare exceptions, were Willkie's gains. By the third roll call, Willkie had moved briskly out in front in the East. On the penultimate fifth ballot, the Hoosier spread-eagled the field in the East, receiving five times as many votes from these twelve states as Dewey and Taft combined. Taft failed to win the nomination because of his disastrous showing in the East, where his maximum share of the vote was 10 per cent on the fifth ballot. On the fifth ballot, by contrast, Willkie had more than 68 per cent of the vote from the East. The inexorable trend toward Willkie in the East can be traced in state after state.

TABLE II  
SECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE BALLOTING AT  
THE 1940 REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

	<i>EAST</i>				
	First Ballot	Second Ballot	Third Ballot	Fourth Ballot	Fifth Ballot
Dewey	108	98	73	63	10
Taft	12	15	16	20	32
Willkie	50	90	150	163	221
Others	152	119	83	76	59
	<i>MIDDLE WEST</i>				
Dewey	112	95	108	75	31
Taft	69	77	76	106	141
Willkie	26	41	55	72	102
Others	115	109	83	69	48
	<i>WEST</i>				
Dewey	65	65	63	50	13
Taft	20	23	27	33	71
Willkie	17	21	28	35	44
Others	50	43	34	34	24
	<i>SOUTH</i>				
Dewey	71	76	69	61	3
Taft	83	83	87	90	125
Willkie	11	18	24	32	58
Others	26	14	11	8	5
	<i>TERRITORIES</i>				
Dewey	4	4	2	1	0
Taft	5	5	6	5	8
Willkie	1	1	2	4	4
Others	3	3	3	3	1

New York, richest in votes with ninety-two, withheld thirty-one votes from Dewey on the first ballot. Of these, only eight went to Willkie. But the Willkie managers knew that the Simpson delegates from New York City and the Gannett delegates from upstate New York would come to their candidate on an early ballot. The third ballot became the important turning point for Willkie in New York when Walter Mack, Jr., challenged the accuracy of the count reported by the chairman. A poll of the delegation brought to light ten more Willkie votes, for a total of twenty-seven. Mack later revealed that the chairman, a Dewey manager, had been reporting the vote of the state arbitrarily without polling the delegates.<sup>61</sup> The flow of New York delegates to Willkie continued on the fourth ballot (thirty-five) and became a hemorrhage on the fifth ballot (seventy-five), when Dewey released his delegates.

The same pattern was followed in New Jersey. The disgruntled adherents of former Governor Harold Hoffman, still smarting over their defeat in the gubernatorial primary by the Dewey organization, led the exodus to Willkie which began on the first ballot. They were joined on the third ballot by the chairman of the delegation, who had been the Dewey manager in the state. By the fifth ballot only a handful of Dewey diehards from Hudson County held out.<sup>62</sup> New Jersey was in the vanguard of the trend toward Willkie, despite Dewey's triumph in the primary. The inability of Dewey to hold even the delegates pledged to him was a hard blow to his prestige and may have influenced the decisions of a number of uncommitted delegations to turn to Willkie.

Willkie, for example, fell heir to most of the favorite-son votes from the East. The six New England states, which had hoarded their votes in favorite-son caches, served as a vital reservoir of Willkie strength by providing nourishing additions to his totals on each of several ballots. Sixteen solid votes from Connecticut on the first ballot gave Willkie a nucleus for regional expansion. Massachusetts, in a shift later characterized by Willkie as an "important break" coming at a "psychological moment," abandoned its favorite son, Representative Joseph Martin, after two roll calls.<sup>63</sup> New

---

<sup>61</sup> Deposition by Walter Mack, Jr., 1950, Oral History Project (Columbia University Library, New York).

<sup>62</sup> Newark *Evening News*, June 28, 1940.

<sup>63</sup> Boston *Herald*, June 29, 1940.





Wendell Willkie holding a press conference at the Philadelphia convention on the day of his nomination, June 28, 1940.  
(Associated Press photo, courtesy Indiana University Alumni Office, Bloomington, Ind.)

England became a Willkie bastion on the third ballot when the Indianan received sixty-six of the region's eighty-eight votes. Even in Pennsylvania, Willkie made inroads on the favorite-son holdings of Governor Arthur James, who apparently took his presidential candidacy seriously. Despite all of the pressure brought by the leaders of the state organization to hold the delegation for James, a tight Willkie enclave was formed in the Pennsylvania delegation on the second ballot.

In the East, Willkie easily vanquished Dewey, his principal regional rival. But it was Senator Taft who climbed past the fading Dewey to regional leadership in the Middle West. In spite of the noticeable inroads made by Willkie on the Ohio Senator's estimated preconvention strength, he trailed Taft in the Middle West throughout the balloting. But Taft's comparatively modest advantage over Willkie in the Middle West did not compensate for his crushing deficit in the East.

Ohio's steadfast support for her Junior Senator endowed Taft with a continuing regional advantage over Willkie. Taft was also the principal beneficiary when the Dewey vote from Illinois began to disintegrate after the first ballot. As the contest narrowed to a choice between Willkie and Taft, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Iowa gravitated toward the Ohio Senator. Although outnumbered, the Willkie forces in the Middle West were not swamped, however, as majorities from Indiana and Missouri joined them on the third ballot. Missouri had been the most important center of Willkie strength in the preconvention period. But the Indiana delegation moved by bits and pieces toward Willkie as the balloting continued. National Committeeman William G. Irwin and Representative Charles Halleck were joined in the Willkie column by onetime Republican National Chairman Will Hays and Homer Capehart. Even former Senator James E. Watson agreed to let Willkie lead the choir in the Republican church and switched to him on the fifth ballot.<sup>64</sup> Then late in the balloting, two middle western states helped Willkie to clinch the nomination. On the fifth ballot, Alfred Landon announced that his Kansas delegation was now grouped solidly behind Willkie.<sup>65</sup> And it was Michigan which

---

<sup>64</sup> Maurice Early, "The Day in Indiana," *Indianapolis Star*, June 27-29, 1940.

<sup>65</sup> *Emporia Gazette*, June 28, 1940.

sent Willkie over the top to final victory when the issue was still in doubt halfway through the sixth ballot.<sup>66</sup>

Further west in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast states, however, Willkie lagged behind Taft on all ballots. In fact, Taft was pulling away from Willkie in the West on the fifth ballot, when Willkie was only one roll call away from the nomination. Willkie made little impression on the larger western delegations from California and Washington. California divided her votes among as many as ten candidates; Washington voted unanimously for Taft on the next to last fifth ballot. The only well-known regional leader to enlist with Willkie was Governor Ralph Carr, of Colorado, and he brought only a minority of his delegation with him. But Willkie picked up enough scattered votes from New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming, and Montana to keep him in the running. On the fifth ballot, Willkie received twenty-six of a possible forty votes from these splinter delegations.

In the South as well, Taft maintained a substantial lead over Willkie throughout the balloting. When the Dewey vote from the South broke up after the fourth ballot, most of it went to Taft. Only the states of the Upper South made a contribution to the Willkie victory. Virginia, where genuine Willkie sentiment existed before the convention, provided him with his largest bloc of southern votes with eleven on the fifth ballot. A band of Willkie delegates was formed in the Tennessee delegation under the leadership of Paul J. Kreusi. This prominent businessman had long been recognized as an influential behind-the-scenes organizer for the Tennessee GOP, but his responsibilities as head of two Chattanooga manufacturing concerns had limited his political role until his enthusiasm for Willkie drove him to participate more actively.<sup>67</sup> More representative of the South as a whole, however, were the delegations from Texas, Louisiana, and Kentucky, which became a solid Taft phalanx on the fifth ballot.

The voting pattern in the Middle West, West, and South shows clearly that Willkie did not blitz the 1940 Republican national convention. His landslide in the East barely carried him through to a narrow national victory. Until the final ballot, Willkie was a minority candidate west of Pennsylvania

---

<sup>66</sup> Johnson, *Republican Party and Willkie*, 99, 99-100n.

<sup>67</sup> Nashville *Banner*, June 28, 1940.

and south of Maryland. The lines of the Taft supporters in the Middle West, West, and South held firm until after Willkie's mass of eastern votes had nudged him across the line to victory on the touch-and-go sixth ballot.

The contemporary belief that Willkie was carried to victory on a tidal wave of sound from the galleries has survived despite the evidence that Taft's delegates in the Middle West, West, and South stuck with him and were not stampeded. The first marked pro-Willkie demonstrations among the spectators began during the first night session of June 24.<sup>68</sup> When the presidential balloting began three days later, the alliterative appeal of "We Want Willkie" had become almost deafening. The millions of people listening intently over their radios to the proceedings in Philadelphia received the indelible impression that the convention hall was controlled by Willkie supporters. The actual effect on the delegates themselves is difficult to assess accurately. The relentless chant may have swayed some who were undecided and uncommitted. An editorial writer for William Allen White's *Emporia Gazette* attributed the Kansans' change of front to the waves of pro-Willkie mail flowing from the folks back home.<sup>69</sup> But other delegates were openly annoyed by the nerve-jangling uproar. One political reporter commented: "It was highly interesting to observe the animated resentment on the faces of many of the delegates, some of whom, glaring angrily at the cheering spectators, were booing back at the Willkie partisans."<sup>70</sup> Some delegates, resting in their hotel rooms after the pandemonium of the convention floor, were irked when they were disturbed by the delivery of fresh batches of pro-Willkie telegrams. Other thrifty delegates complained when they totaled the tips dispensed into the hands of waiting bellboys for delivery of the pro-Willkie messages.<sup>71</sup> The organized cheering for Willkie may even have backfired to the extent that it drove supporters of other major candidates to work harder. The Taft leaders, for example, were incensed when they became convinced that Samuel Pryor, Jr., chairman of the committee on arrangements, had

---

<sup>68</sup> New York *Times*, June 25, 1940.

<sup>69</sup> *Emporia Gazette*, June 28, 1940.

<sup>70</sup> Sidney M. Shalett, New York *Times*, June 27, 1940.

<sup>71</sup> Nashville, Tenn., *Banner*, June 25, 1940; Raleigh, N.C., *News and Observer*, June 25, 1940.

deliberately packed the galleries with leather-lunged Willkie partisans.<sup>72</sup>

But the most well-preserved and widely circulated of the myths clustering around the nomination of Willkie is that his victory was a political miracle because he came to Philadelphia lacking an organization which could translate his demonstrated popularity with the people into the hard currency of convention votes. On the contrary, before the trial by ballot began a thoroughly professional corps of Willkie managers drawn from across the nation was mapping plans for convention strategy. Such youthful governors as Raymond Baldwin, of Connecticut, William Vanderbilt, of Rhode Island, Leverett Saltonstall, of Massachusetts, Harold Stassen, of Minnesota, and Ralph Carr, of Colorado, had aligned themselves with Willkie. From among the national committeemen he could rely on Samuel Pryor, of Connecticut, Walter Hallanan, of West Virginia, and Sinclair Weeks, of Massachusetts. A sprinkling of Republican congressmen were found among Willkie's convention backers: Clifford Hope, of Kansas, Charles Halleck, of Indiana, Frank Horton, of Wyoming, and Bruce Barton, of New York.

In addition, while the 1940 convention was not bossed in the traditional sense of the word, there were a number of state leaders willing and able to provide Willkie with vital transfusions of votes at critical junctures. Standouts among this group were Mayor Rolland Marvin, of Syracuse, New York County Chairman Kenneth Simpson, Alfred M. Landon, of Kansas, Senator Styles Bridges, of New Hampshire, and Frank Harris, of Pennsylvania. Willkie also benefited from the enthusiasm he had kindled in a number of previously inarticulate Republican businessmen, such as Edgar M. Queeny, of Missouri, and Paul J. Kreusi, of Tennessee, who then became active in the organizational politics at a state level which produces votes at national conventions.

Finally, Willkie owed much to the favorite sons who played a key role in the convention. After Dewey's bid for a first-ballot nomination had fallen short, the Willkie and Taft managers worked feverishly to fill their ranks not only with Dewey's former followers but also from among the 346 delegates who had sat on the fence during the first round

---

<sup>72</sup> *New York Times*, June 27, 1940.

and voted for favorite sons. A series of decisions for Willkie on the part of favorite sons, or their delegates, were decisive in tipping the scales in his favor. The bulk of the support originally pledged to Arthur Vandenberg, Joseph Martin, Styles Bridges, Arthur Capper, Charles McNary, Arthur James, and Frank Gannett found its way to Willkie. Only the handful of delegates grouped around Hanford MacNider and Harlan Bushfield elected to transfer their allegiance to Taft.

Willkie was undeniably a political amateur in 1940; but he gave exceptional promise of being a winner. There were ample precedents from American political history in which a minority party, queasy over prospects for survival, bypassed professional leadership to entrust its political fortunes to a man without political experience. In most of the previous instances, the nomination had gone to a military man. In 1940 it went to a businessman. Willkie was nominated not as the result of a political miracle but by hard work and skillful management.