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THE FIRST NOMINATION OF BENJAMIN HARRISON FOR THE PRESIDENCY

by

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THE FIRST NOMINATION OF BENJAMIN HARRISON FOR THE PRESIDENCY

In his annual message to Congress in December 1887, President Grover Cleveland disregarded an heretofore set custom and established a precedent by devoting his whole attention to one question alone—that of the tariff. Pointing out the dangers of retaining a surplus in the Treasury, he stated that he favored a decrease in import duties as a means of reducing the accumulated surplus. The support accorded President Cleveland by the Democratic House, in framing the Mills Bill, and by the Democratic National Convention indicated the willingness of the Democrats to make the tariff the major issue of the ensuing campaign. That the Republicans were not averse to accepting the challenge is shown by the readiness with which they seized upon the issue. The gauntlet thrown down by President Cleveland was taken up by James C. Blaine, who in a London interview on the day after the delivery of the message, replied to the President's arguments in a manner that left no uncertainty as to his position. Following Blaine's pronouncement, no doubt existed as to the subject around which the campaign would be waged.

The weight given to Blaine's utterance was due to the exalted preference which he enjoyed as the recognized Republican leader and to the general belief that he was the most probable candidate for the Republican nomination for the Presidency. However, on February 12, 1888, B. F. Jones, chairman of the Republican National Committee, gave out a letter received from Blaine, who was then in Italy, which letter stated that Blaine was not a candidate. This statement was a signal for the advancement of several candidates, among whom appeared Benjamin Harrison, of Indiana. The Philadelphia American believed that no survey of the presidential field should omit a view of two of those who were suggested for
the Republican nomination, John Sherman and Benjamin Harrison, neither of whom, in their opinion, was a "dark horse."¹

A more complete knowledge and a fuller understanding of those events which lead to the nomination of Harrison as President demand a brief consideration of the public life and views of the man. Benjamin Harrison was born at North Bend, Ohio, August 20, 1833, the son of John Scott Harrison and the grandson of William Henry Harrison. He obtained his earlier education at a log school house in the vicinity of his home, while his later training was received at Farmer's College, near Cincinnati, and Miami University, from which he graduated when eighteen years of age. After studying law in Cincinnati, young Harrison was granted admittance to the bar in 1853, the actual entrance to which was postponed until his removal to Indianapolis in 1854. In July 1862, he entered the Federal army as second lieutenant and assisted in organizing the Seventieth Indiana regiment. In August, he was promoted to be colonel, and on January 23, 1865, he was brevetted brigadier-general of volunteers "for ability and manifest energy and gallantry in command of brigade."² Returning to civil life, Harrison resumed his occupation as reporter of the Supreme Court of Indiana, having been elected in 1860 and re-elected in 1864.

In 1876, substituting for Orth as the Republican candidate for Governor of Indiana, Harrison was defeated, although he ran two thousand votes ahead of his ticket. Four years later he was elected to the United States Senate and took his seat in that body March 4, 1881. Upon the expiration of his term in 1887, he failed in his attempt at re-

¹Indianapolis Journal, April 9, 1886.
²Quoted in the New International Encyclopedia, "Benjamin Harrison."
election. In the Republican National Conventions of 1880 and 1884, Harrison represented his State as delegate-at-large and in the former instance headed the Indiana delegation. And in the Garfield campaign of 1880, Harrison accompanied the Republican candidate on his speaking tour of the State of New York. After his victory in the fall, Garfield extended to Harrison an invitation to become one of his official family in the new Cabinet which he was forming. Harrison declined the offer, however, preferring to assume the duties of the senatorial office. It is perhaps as appropriate here as elsewhere to note that by 1877 Harrison had attained recognition as a leader of the Indiana bar and had won for himself no mean reputation as a speaker.

In the forty-seventh Congress, in which Harrison served as a Senator, a bill was introduced to prohibit the admission, for a period of twenty years, of Chinese laborers. The bill passed Congress, but Harrison, with Senator Hoar, of Massachusetts, held that it was contrary to the obligations imposed upon the United States by the Burlingame Treaty of 1868. Naught deterred by President Arthur's veto, a similar bill, providing in this case for the prohibition of Chinese immigration for ten years, was introduced, passed, and signed. As with the preceding bill, Senator Harrison stated his opposition to be based upon purely American principles, and on the principle of our treaty obligations. An account of Harrison's stand on the Chinese exclusion bills, as published in the New York Herald and copied over the country, was cited by the forces behind the Gresham candidacy as sufficient reason for no longer granting Harrison consideration as a presidential possibility, alluding to the plank in Blaine's platform calling for Chinese exclusion.¹

Other prominent measures which came before Congress during Harrison's term as Senator included the Civil Service Reform Bill and the bill creating the Tariff Commission, both of which received the advocacy and support of Harrison.

To quote General Lew Wallace, "General Harrison had a record upon nearly, if not quite, every topic that might be raised in the canvass before the American public. It consisted mostly of speeches made at different times and places. . . ."

1 Discussing the currency question, Harrison condemned what he termed the "fiat heresy" and the attempt to cheapen money. He thought that the surplus in the Treasury might be utilized in making the coast defenses secure, in seeing that the navy was "made respectable," and in the safeguarding of the claims of the survivors of the Union army. He favored subsidizing American steamships, advocated labor legislation to compel employers to protect the health and persons of their employees, the prompt payment of wages in money, as well as urging more effective cooperation between capital and labor. Harrison spoke out against imported gang, or contract, labor, both while in and out of Congress. In a speech on the tariff, October 22, 1883, Harrison said, "Let us not forget that the tariff question, as we have it in American politics, is not in its ultimate statement a question as to what duty shall be levied on this or that article of import. The broader question must be settled first whether we may and should in fixing these duties so adjust them as to protect American industries." And in the same speech, after declaring that the tariff helps labor, "Republicans differ upon such questions (par-

1 Wallace, Lew, Life of General Benjamin Harrison, p. 274.
2 Ibid., pp. 279-83. Speech made at Richmond, Indiana, August 9, 1878.
ticular rates), but that our legislation should discriminate in favor of our country, her industries, and laboring people, should not be questioned."

On April 19, 1888, the thirteen Republican district conventions of Indiana met and chose their respective delegates to the National Convention. Of these district conventions, the first twelve instructed their delegates for Benjamin Harrison and the two men selected in the thirteenth district pledged themselves to that course of action. On May 3 the Republican State Convention elected four delegates-at-large to the National Convention, these delegates pledged to Harrison. The delegates-at-large were: James N. Huston, chairman of the Indiana State Central Committee; Colonel Richard W. Thompson; Clement Studebaker, the manufacturer; and ex-Governor Albert G. Porter.

The National Republican Convention was called for June 19, but for several days prior to that date the delegates and party workers commenced to concentrate upon Chicago, that city having been designated as the convention host. Among the delegates, there was a certain Southerner who, according to report, upon receiving an introduction to General Lew Wallace, said, "General, I asked to be presented to you, so as to tell you how much I liked Ben Hur."

"Thanks," replied Wallace pleasantly, "but I am more interested in another Ben - Ben Harrison - and I want you to like him." 2

The Republican Convention, upon assembling, elected John M. Thurston, of Nebraska, as temporary chairman, and M. M. Estee, of California, as permanent president. The platform, as adopted June 21, charged

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1 Wallace, Benjamin Harrison, pp. 264-87. Quoted from a speech as reported in the Iowa State Register, October 22, 1883.
2 Indianapolis News, June 18, 1888.
that the Democratic majority in the lower House of Congress owed its existence to the unlawful suppression of the ballot, characterized the conduct of foreign affairs by the Cleveland administration as being "distinguished by its inefficiency and cowardice," and arraigned the administration for "its weak and unpatriotic treatment of the fisheries question." The platform further declared the party's uncompromising adherence to the American system of protection, its hostility to the introduction into the United States of foreign contract labor and of Chinese labor. The Republicans favored the enactment of "such legislation as will best secure the rehabilitation of our American merchant marine," and demanded "appropriations for the early rebuilding of our navy." After denouncing the attitude of President Cleveland and the Democratic House of Representatives in dealing with the pension requests, the platform closed by inviting "the cooperation of patriotic men of all parties, and especially of all workingmen, whose prosperity is seriously threatened by the free-trade policy of the present administration."

By Thursday afternoon the convention had reached a stage in the proceedings which called for the presentation of candidates for the Presidency. First to respond to the roll call of the States was Connecticut, who presented the name of Joseph R. Hawley. Speaking for Illinois, Leonard Swett nominated Walter Q. Gresham. In this connection there is some little historical interest, for it was this same Leonard Swett who had presented Abraham Lincoln's name to the Republican Convention of 1860. Succeeding Swett on the program came ex-Governor Albert G. Porter, of Indiana, who had been chosen by his delegation to place the name of Benjamin Harrison before the convention.

In his nominating speech, Governor Porter gave a fine character sketch of Benjamin Harrison; he traced his career, beginning with his coming to the State of Indiana in 1854, when Harrison was but twenty-one years of age. Relating how upon coming to his adopted State, Harrison had entered upon the practice of law, and had achieved immediate success, he lauded the fairness, integrity, and heroism of Harrison in his rise from poverty and obscurity. Then, with the outbreak of the great Rebellion, Harrison had relinquished his profession; he had raised a regiment and had received from Governor Morton the commission of a colonel. Stressing another aspect, Governor Porter proceeded, "We stand here in the imperial city of the Northwest. The name of no family has ever been more identified with the Northwest than the family of General Benjamin Harrison." Following some discussion of William Henry Harrison as Secretary of the Northwest Territory and as Delegate to Congress from the Territory, mention was made that William Henry Harrison, although President for just a short time, had attempted Civil Service Reform. Porter concluded his nominating speech with the following words, "And now, today, in Indiana, among a people estimating highly the character and services of General Benjamin Harrison, and holding in affection the memory of "Old Tippecanoe," the latch strings are hospitably out to you, the doors are waiting to fly open at your touch to let in the joyful air that shall bear upon its wings the message that Benjamin Harrison, soldier and statesman, has been nominated for the Presidency of the United States." The nomination of Harrison was seconded by Mr. Terrill, of Texas, and by Mr. Gallinger, of New Hampshire.

1 Quoted in Indianapolis News, June 21.
2 Ibid., June 21.
Other potential candidates placed in nomination were Hon. William E. Allison, of Iowa; General Russell A. Alger, of Michigan; Chauncey M. Depew, of New York; John Sherman, of Ohio; Mayor Pitler, of Philadelphia; and Governor Rusk, of Wisconsin. James G. Blaine, the "plumed knight" of 1884 was not formally placed in nomination.

With the presentation of the candidates accomplished, the convention was then ready to proceed with the balloting. Three ballots were taken on Friday, June 22; two on the 23rd; and three on the 25th (the 24th being on Sunday). The number of votes necessary for a choice was 416 on every ballot except the fourth, when 415 constituted a simple majority. "The first vote for a candidate showed an extraordinary lack of concentration." Senator John Sherman, who led all other candidates with 229 votes, had but little more than one-half of the number necessary to nominate. Judge Gresham, the next on the list, with 111, had less than half as many as Senator Sherman, and only one delegate from his own State of Indiana supported him, Judge Field, of Crown Point. The other twenty-nine of Indiana's vote went to Harrison. The extent to which the votes were scattered among the fourteen candidates may be seen from the statement that "on the first vote for a candidate, Senator Sherman received more or less support from twenty-three States and Territories, Judge Gresham from twenty-three, Mr. Harrison from twenty-three, Mr. Alger from twenty, Mr. Allison from nineteen, Mr. Depew from sixteen, and Mr. Blaine from thirteen. Only nine States of the Union gave a solid vote to any candidate, and five of the nine presented "favorite sons" as candidates." Other candidates besides Sherman and Gresham to

1Stanwood, History of the Presidency, p. 478.
2Ibid., p. 479.
receive more than fifty votes were Chauncey M. Depew, with 95; Russell A. Alger, with 84; Benjamin Harrison, with 80; and William B. Allison, with 72. James G. Blaine, with thirty-five votes, occupied seventh place in the ranking.

On the second and third ballots there was no material change in the relative positions of the candidates. John Sherman reached the zenith of his power in the convention on the second ballot with 249 votes; on the third ballot he lost five votes. Similarly, Judge Gresham attained his greatest strength on the third ballot with 123 votes. Chauncey M. Depew, after twice polling 99 votes, dropped to 91 on the third ballot. At this stage of the convention he withdrew from the contest and gave his support to Harrison. Alger, of Michigan, obtained 116 on the second, and 122 on the third, ballot. General Harrison on these two pollings made no appreciable gains, receiving on the second ballot 91, and on the third ballot 94, votes. As on the first ballot, Judge Field, of the Indiana delegation, gave his vote to Gresham on each of these two ballots. His action was imitated on the second and third ballots by another Indiana delegate, C. W. Simons, of Plymouth. On each of the second and third ballots the convention's votes were distributed among twelve candidates.

1This total is according to Stanwood, History of the Presidency, p. 479. Newspaper reports, with votes for the respective candidates tabulated by States and Territories, indicate that on the first ballot Harrison secured 83 votes. These same reports, however, show that 853 votes had been cast, while Stanwood shows an aggregate number of 830. Stanwood, by giving only the combined totals for each of the candidates, gives no clue as to locating the discrepancy and affords no accurate means of checking. He does err, nevertheless, in stating that no Indiana delegate supported Gresham on the first ballot. (See Stanwood, p. 478). Judge Field, of the thirteenth Indiana district, entered his vote in the Gresham column.
The results of the fourth ballot showed that ten candidates continued to receive support from the convention, and likewise showed that Harrison had gained greatly at the expense of the others. His aggregate of votes had jumped from 94 to 217, scattered among thirty States and Territories. Notable accessions to the Harrison column came from New York, who contributed 59 out of her 72 votes, and from Wisconsin, who, in abandoning Rusk, added twenty votes. The Harrison enthusiasts noted with pleasure that for the first time in the course of the balloting the entire Indiana delegation cast its 30 votes for Harrison. The only other candidates besides General Harrison to make a gain on the fourth ballot were Russell A. Alger and James G. Blaine. The former added thirteen votes to his total of the third ballot, thereby giving him 135 votes. Blaine had 42 votes, seven more than he had on the preceding poll.

The complexion of the situation was not noticeably changed on the fifth and sixth ballots. On the former, Benjamin Harrison lost four votes, bringing his total down to 213, representative of support from twenty-eight States and Territories. Beginning with the fifth ballot, Indiana accorded Harrison only 29 votes, Judge Field having returned to his original course of action in voting for Gresham. On the same ballot, the votes were scattered among seven candidates. The sixth ballot showed that Harrison, who had been second in the standing since the fourth ballot, had obtained 231 votes as compared with the 244 of Senator Sherman. Beginning with this ballot and continuing through the remaining two, the New York delegation voted her 72 votes as a unit for the grandson of "Old Tippecanoe."
Harrison augmented his total on the seventh ballot and with 270 votes forged ahead of Sherman who had 231 votes. He received support from thirty-two States and Territories. California supplied the largest single accession to the Harrison column by casting out of her block of 16 votes 15 for him, the first time she had in the slightest degree encouraged Harrison's candidacy.

The eighth vote proved to be the deciding one, with Harrison receiving support from forty-five States and Territories, and with an aggregate of 544 votes to his credit. Twenty-three delegations went solidly for Harrison, including Wisconsin, with 22 votes; Texas, with 26; New York, with 72; New Jersey, with 18. Besides these, Pennsylvania gave the successful nominee 59 out of 60 votes; Massachusetts, 25 out of 26; Iowa, 22 out of 26; Indiana, 29 out of 30; and California, 15 out of 16. On the final ballot Ohio was still voting for Sherman, only one vote going for Harrison. In a like manner, Illinois, who had been adhering to Gresham, spared only four out of her 44 votes for Harrison. The last ballot showed that Sherman had 118 votes, while Judge Gresham had gradually fallen to a total of 59 votes. This same ballot registered 100 votes in favor of Russell A. Alger.

After the results had been announced and it was known that General Harrison had been nominated, Governor Foraker, on behalf of the Ohio delegation, moved to make the nomination unanimous. Mr. Horr, of Michigan, seconded the motion of Governor Foraker. Others who followed Mr. Horr in seconding the nomination included Chauncey M. Depew; Governor Hastings, of Pennsylvania; General Henderson of Iowa; Mr. Boutelle, of Maine. The chairman put the motion, which was carried, and
declared Benjamin Harrison to be the nominee for the Presidency.

The above description probably suffices, in a limited way, to present the more formal aspects and external phases of the nomination of Benjamin Harrison. However, it does not serve to penetrate beneath the superficialities to the more basic and important elements. It is both requisite and proper that an attempt should be made to effect an analysis of the forces and motives underlying and prompting those actions culminating in the nomination of Benjamin Harrison. To state the proposition in more general terms, what factor or set of factors led to the nomination?

Although James G. Blaine had asserted earlier in the year that he would not be a candidate for the Presidency, "pervading the convention at all times, up to the moment that a nomination was effected, was a feeling that the name of Mr. Blaine might be presented in such a way, at a critical period, that the convention would be carried away by an outburst of irrepressible enthusiasm, and that he would be summoned to lead the party again by a call so vociferous that he could not decline." However, after the convention formally met, Blaine categorically declined to be placed in the role of a presidential candidate. In withdrawing, he suggested Benjamin Harrison, of Indiana. Harrison would not come out as an opponent while Blaine was a prospective candidate and it was only after Blaine had announced in February that he would not be a candidate that Harrison appeared in the position of a presidential possibility. The position of Blaine as Republican leader and the evidence that Harrison had been a Blaine man no doubt added some

1Stanwood, History of the Presidency, p. 478.
2Creshman, Life of Walter C. Gresham, pp. 567-68.
weight to Harrison's candidacy after it was known positively that Blaine would not accept the nomination.

Although the New York State Republican Convention had not instructed its delegates to the Chicago convention, during the three ballots in which the name of Chauncey Depew appeared before the National Convention, the New York delegation cast 71 out of 72 votes for the New York man. It was apparent, however, that the so-called "Granger States" - especially Iowa - were hostile to railway management and railway men. As a consequence of this feeling, they spoke in bitter terms of Depew's candidacy. Because of this situation Depew decided to retire from the contest.¹ The New York delegation finally agreed unanimously that the four delegates-at-large should meet and see if they could agree upon a candidate who could command the support of the entire delegation of the State. "The object was, of course, to make the State, with its larger number of delegates than any other commonwealth, a deciding factor in the selection."²

The meeting of the four delegates-at-large revealed differences in opinions respecting the candidates and the plan to be adopted. Platt and Hiscock declared for Senator Allison, of Iowa, while Miller asserted himself for Sherman with equal warmth. "A heated controversy arose between Mr. Platt and Mr. Miller, during which Mr. Platt said that neither he nor any of his friends would vote for Sherman if he was nominated. Senator Hiscock, who was always a pacifier, interrupted them, saying: 'Mr. Depew has said nothing as yet. I suggest that we hear his views.' Mr. Platt and Mr. Miller responded to this sug-

¹Depew, Chauncey M., My Memories of Eighty Years, p. 130.  
²Ibid.
estion and I replied: "Gentlemen, New York has given to me its cordial and practically unanimous support, and I have felt under the circumstances that I should follow and not lead. The situation which has grown out of this discussion here eliminates two candidates. Without the aid of Senator Platt and his friends, Mr. Sherman could not carry New York. Iowa has gone to the extreme of radical legislation which threatens the investment in securities of her railroads. New York is such a capitalistic State that no man identified with that legislation could carry a majority of the vote of its people, and that makes Allison impossible. There is one candidate here who at present apparently has no chance, but who, nevertheless, seems to me to possess more popular qualifications than any other, and that is General Harrison, of Indiana. I do not know him, but he rose from the humblest beginnings until he became the leader of the bar of his State. He enlisted in the Civil War as a second-lieutenant, and by conspicuous bravery and skill upon the field of battle came out as brigadier-general. As United States Senator he became informed about foreign affairs. His grandfather, President William Henry Harrison, had one of the most picturesque campaigns in our history. There are enough survivors of that "hard cider and log cabin" canvass to make an attractive contribution on the platform at every meeting, and thus add a certain historic flavor to General Harrison's candidacy." After some discussion the other three agreed. We reported our conclusion to the delegation, which by an overwhelming majority, assented to the conclusions of the four delegates-at-large."

Subsequent to the conference of, and despite the decision of, the

1Depew, Memories, pp. 130-32.
four delegates-at-large, the New York delegation did not at once give
whole-hearted support to Harrison but withheld it until the sixth
ballot. On the fourth and fifth ballots, Harrison received 59 and 58
votes respectively. Of the remaining votes, Blaine had 8 on the fourth
ballot and 6 on the fifth ballot. A Chicago dispatch to the Indianapo-
lis News, June 23, stated that the "developments of this morning show
very clearly that the nominee will be Blaine." This assumption was bas-
ed upon the grounds of New York's support of Harrison and it was ex-
pected that this vote would be materially cut, and gradually shifted to
Allison or Alger. The object would be to beat the opposing candidates
in detail and show that the only recourse was to call on Blaine. This
unfulfilled prophecy, on the one hand, serves as an example of the more
general view that Blaine would ultimately be made the standard-bearer
and, on the other hand, shows that the unexpected support of Harrison
by New York was considered as of passing moment. There seems to be
some justification for the latter point of view. Platt made overtures
to support Gresham in return for certain concessions from him but he
failed, however, to reach any agreement with Gresham and eventually
threw his support to Harrison. The action of New York evoked wide-
spread comment and gave an unexpected impetus to the Harrison move-ment.

A comparison of the political views of Benjamin Harrison and the
stand of the Republican platform on these same questions discloses
fair agreement. Does it follow, however, that agreement caused the
nomination of Harrison? It will be recalled that Harrison's action on
the question of Chinese exclusion and the expression of the convention

1 An explanation of this might be sought in the supposed desire of
Platt to become Secretary of the Treasury.
on that same question are not consonant with each other. Quite naturally, the State to be most affected by non-exclusion of the Chinese would be California. But that State, on the seventh and eighth ballots gave the Indiana man 15 out of 16 votes. If a State vitally concerned over such an issue will vote for a man in spite of disagreement with his actions, it is presuming to say that much importance is attached to the concurrence or non-concurrence of a candidate’s previous utterances with the party platform, unless, of course, there is too pronounced a discrepancy. And in the case of Harrison, comparison indicates more than moderate agreement.

Another phase of the matter which should not be disregarded concerns the two most notable of the “doubtful States,” Indiana and New York. At the Democratic National Convention, which met in St. Louis, June 5, Senator Voorhees, in nominating Governor Gray, of Indiana, for the Vice-Presidency, stated that the key of the situation (referring to the election) was in Indiana. “Grover Cleveland, and whoever else goes on the ticket with him, will be re-elected this fall with the vote of Indiana, or will not be re-elected at all. Make no mistake. I know of certain calculations to leave Indiana out. Whatever influences destroy Indiana, destroy every hope and vestige of success.”¹ The Republicans saw the advantages which would accrue to them by deferring to the wishes of Indiana, as likewise to the desires of New York, who might, with her 36 electoral votes, determine the results of the election, and acted accordingly.

General Lew Wallace, in his biography of Harrison, published in the interests of the fall campaign, says that “the candidates for the

¹Quoted in the Indianapolis Journal, June 9.
Presidential nomination were numerous, all amongst the foremost men of the party in the nation. Upon their individual merits it would have been impossible to have gone amiss. There was, in fact, no room for difference in choice, except upon the ground of expediency. This statement, though probably made with the intention of ironing out any ill-will or hard feelings which might have resulted from the convention, is of dubious value. To say that a candidate has been selected on the basis of expediency is to evade the question.

"Expediency" may cover a multitude of things and if unexplained is vague and indefinite in its connotation. (For this reason it serves a useful purpose in the realm of politics). In the case of Benjamin Harrison it is the combination of circumstances rather than any single factor which made his nomination possible in 1888. His reputation as a lawyer, as a speaker, the substance of his speeches, Blaine's attitude, New York's endorsement, consideration of the "doubtful States"—if these factors constitute the meaning of the term, then expediency may be said to explain the nomination of Benjamin Harrison for the Presidency in 1888.

1Wallace, Benjamin Harrison, pp. 269-70.


Indianapolis *Journal*, (January-June, 1888).

Indianapolis *News*, (January-June, 1888).

Indianapolis *Sentinel*, (April-June, 1888).

Chicago *Tribune*, (April-June, 1888).