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Flapping Coattails and Feuding Republicans

Theodore Roosevelt and the South Dakota Election of 1908

In the election year of 1908, the Republican Party in South Dakota stood at a fork in the road. Some of the party faithful, known as the "Stalwarts," took the conservative path of traditional laissez-faire economics, resisting government intervention in the business of the country. Others took a more liberal path, referring to themselves as "Progressives," although their opponents often labeled them "insurgents." They believed that the growing complexities and disparities created by the nation's booming economy made governmental influence and even interference necessary. The fact that both groups claimed to be on the side of the outgoing president, Theodore Roosevelt, made this internecine struggle especially intriguing. Each faction of the Republican Party in South Dakota supported Roosevelt's choice for president, William Howard Taft, but aside from that commonality, they agreed on little, except for the desire to be identified with Roosevelt.[1] In the 1908 elections, Stalwarts and Progressives alike sought the advantage that would come from associating themselves with Roosevelt, whom South Dakotans viewed as a product of the West, a native son.

Theodore Roosevelt's rise to national prominence had been meteoric. Following his graduation from Harvard, he embarked on the study of law but found it dull. Craving action and power, he entered the rough-and-tumble world of New York politics in 1881 and successfully ran for the first of three terms in the state assembly, where he took on the cause of political reform.[2]

1. Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota,* 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), pp. 259–61; Calvin Perry Armin, "Coe I. Crawford and the Progressive Movement in South Dakota," *South Dakota Historical Collections* 32 (1964): 26–27; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader,* 6 Apr. 1908.

2. David McCullough, *Mornings on Horseback* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), p. 252.

In 1883, Roosevelt visited the badlands of the Little Missouri River in northern Dakota Territory to hunt buffalo. While pursuing his trophy, he spent enough time with local ranchers to acquire a taste for the West. Before he returned to New York, he had invested in a cattle operation headquartered at the Maltese Cross ranch. Roosevelt had struggled with asthma as a child and grew up determined to make something of himself physically. The vigorous outdoor life of a Dakota cowboy appealed to the tenderfoot from New York. So, too, did the people, most of whom were direct, plain-spoken, and hardworking. Here, on numerous visits over the years, he rode the night rounds with the cowboys and organized and presided over the first stockmen's association on the northern plains. Here, he became a friend of the indomitable Seth Bullock and as a deputy sheriff trailed a pair of thieves, bringing them to justice. It was here, as well, surrounded by towering buttes and prairie silence, that Roosevelt returned to find solace following the deaths of his mother, Martha Bulloch Roosevelt, and his wife, Alice Lee Roosevelt, on the same day and in the same house in February 1884.[3]

Roosevelt spent much of the next three years in the Dakota badlands. In 1886, he returned to New York to reestablish himself in politics. After an unsuccessful bid to become mayor of New York City, he won appointment in 1889 as head of the Civil Service Commission, where he spent six years rooting out political corruption. Then, in 1897, partly due to his highly regarded book, *The Naval War of 1812,* Roosevelt became assistant secretary of the navy.[4]

With the beginning of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Roosevelt promptly resigned his office in order to go to war in Cuba. Awarded the rank of lieutenant colonel and granted a command in the army, he helped to assemble a diverse regiment of riders, known as the First

3. Nathan Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Life* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1992), pp. 149–56, 162–72; David A. Wolff, *Seth Bullock: Black Hills Lawman,* South Dakota Biography Series (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2009), pp. 126–27. Roosevelt's mother died of typhoid, and his wife succumbed to kidney disease shortly after giving birth to their daughter Alice. Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt,* pp. 155–56.

4. Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt,* pp. 183–85, 204–7, 226, 247–50.

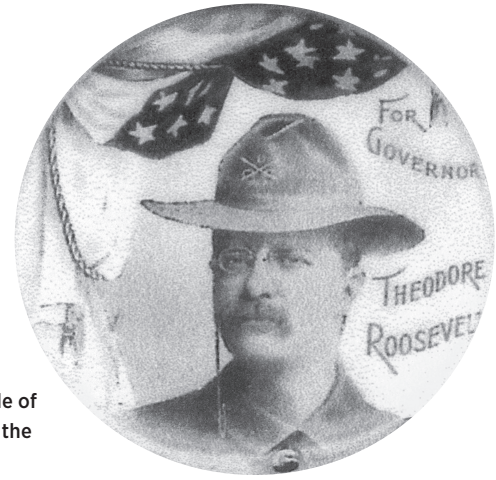
Volunteer Cavalry or the "Rough Riders." Their major task in Cuba was to take out Spanish positions on Kettle Hill and San Juan Hill. With plenty of derring-do by Roosevelt and the brave determination of the soldiers, both goals were quickly accomplished.[5]

Roosevelt returned from the short war covered in glory. Looking for a gubernatorial candidate to go up against Tammany Hall and the Democrats in 1898, New York Republicans settled on their larger-than-life national hero, perhaps the most popular Republican in the nation. Roosevelt won by a narrow margin, but his victory was impressive, considering the power of the opposition.[6]

During his campaign for the governor's seat, Roosevelt continually promised to consult with the power broker of the New York Republican Party, Senator Thomas Platt, before making any critical decisions. Not far into Roosevelt's two-year term, however, his reformist tendencies and penchant for acting independently began to surface, causing the senator no shortage of irritation. Platt's solution to the problem

5. Henry F. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931), pp. 183–84, 193–96.

6. Ibid., pp. 200–208.



Theodore Roosevelt rode the tide of his military success in Cuba into the governorship of New York.

came in the form of a promotion that would effectively catapult Roosevelt into obscurity—run him for vice-president of the United States.[7]

Over the fears of those who warned that the reckless cowboy should not be placed one heartbeat away from the presidency, Roosevelt took his place on the ticket in 1900 with the Republican incumbent, William McKinley. As the vice-presidential candidate, Roosevelt returned to South Dakota, visiting twenty-nine communities between 11 and 14 September. While McKinley stayed "presidential" by campaigning from his front porch, Roosevelt galloped through South Dakota and other western states, corralling voters who might be tempted by William Jennings Bryan to stray off the Republican range, as they had done four years earlier when the Democratic candidate for president carried South Dakota. With the exception of newspapers in Vermillion and Yankton whose Democratic party loyalties were too strong to be swayed, the press carried enthusiastic reports of Roosevelt's being welcomed not only as a military hero but also as a son returning home.[8]

In the election that followed Roosevelt's visit, the Republican ticket carried South Dakota by a hefty margin. Less than a year later, the assassination of William McKinley shook the country. Roosevelt scrambled out of the Adirondack Mountains where he had been vacationing to take the oath of office in Buffalo, New York, on 14 September 1901. At the age of forty-two, he became the twenty-sixth president of the United States and the youngest man in American history to hold the office.[9]

Well aware that he needed to build a base from which he could win election in his own right, Roosevelt conducted a tour of western and midwestern states, including South Dakota, in the spring of 1903. He made several stops in the eastern part of the state, some no more than ten-minute whistle stops and others more elaborate, with staging, in-

7. Ibid., pp. 208–16.

8. H. W. Brands, *T.R.: The Last Romantic* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), pp. 394–97, 399–400; John M. Hilpert, "Thousands of Rough Riders and Monster Parades," in *Papers of the Twenty-seventh Annual Dakota History Conference,* comp. Arthur R. Huseboe and Harry F. Thompson (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1995), pp. 271–74, 276, 282; South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (1907), p. 323.

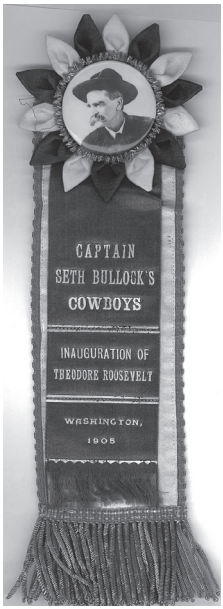
9. Brands, *T.R.,* pp. 411–16.

Spectators swarmed Phillips Avenue to see Roosevelt speak in Sioux Falls in the spring of 1903.

Roosevelt's 1903 presidential visit was occasion for a commemorative ribbon boosting Hot Springs.

troductions, and a speech. The president brought with him five major addresses to be delivered in Chicago, Milwaukee, Saint Paul, Sioux Falls, and Fargo. In his speech in Sioux Falls, entitled "The Wage Worker and the Tiller of the Soil," Roosevelt rehearsed what government had done and might still need to do for farmers, ranchers, and wage-workers. Hinting of things to come, when progressivism became a full-fledged cause and an organized party, Roosevelt alluded to the growing need for government action to help those workers who faced the changes and challenges brought about by new technologies and large aggregations of capital. On his return trip east after touring Yellowstone National Park, Roosevelt chose to make one more stop in South Dakota. During a two-hour visit in Edgemont, Roosevelt brought up his old Dakota ties, especially fitting in the small western town, where he declined to attend a planned banquet in favor of eating with the local working cowboys at a chuckwagon. There he reminisced about his ranching days on the Little Missouri and galloped down Main Street

Roosevelt relished a chance to interact with plainspoken people like Seth Bullock (left foreground) and the cowboys he ate with at a chuck wagon at Edgemont.



Bullock and his cowboys traveled to Washington, D.C., to take part in Roosevelt's inaugural festivities as representatives of the West. This fancy ribbon commemorated their visit.

on a borrowed horse with the cowboys as they fired their six-shooters into the air.[10]

In the presidential election of 1904, South Dakotans stood solidly behind Roosevelt, giving him 71.1 percent of the total votes cast, the fourth highest percentage of any state. On the night of his convincing victory over Democrat Alton B. Parker, the president made a stunning announcement. He would not run for the office again, he said, even though it was a constitutional possibility. This declaration, made in the midst of his victory euphoria, dismayed many observers, who knew that it would create a lame-duck presidency. Roosevelt, however, welcomed the opportunity it would give him to groom a successor. Furthermore, he possessed a sense of fair play that would not permit him to run for what would essentially be a third term.[11]

10. Theodore Roosevelt, *Presidential Addresses and State Papers of Theodore Roosevelt, Part One* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son), pp. 302–10; Gilbert B. Taylor, *Glimpses into Edgemont's Past: A Recording of Early-day Events about Edgemont, South Dakota* (Edgemont, S.Dak.: By the Author, 1961), pp. 75–77.

11. American Presidency Project, "The Election of 1904," http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/elections.php, accessed 28 Jan. 2010; Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt,* p. 441.

Roosevelt credited his election triumph to the "plain people," those who tilled farms, owned and operated small shops, and kept trains running, rather than to politicians and financiers. The years he spent with common folks in Dakota Territory as well as his travels throughout the West had allowed him to graft himself onto their roots. In a letter to his friend, western novelist Owen Wister, he wrote, "I would literally, not figuratively, rather cut off my right hand than forfeit by any improper act of mine the trust and regard of these people."[12]

Roosevelt enjoyed the greatest popular majority and the greatest electoral majority ever granted to a president. It was not surprising, then, that he could take his wife Edith aside and exclaim, "I am no longer a political accident."[13] Many Republicans, however, to say nothing of other partisans, believed he might be an accident waiting to happen. To them, Roosevelt appeared to be the man who could set off an impending earthquake along the fault line that increasingly divided conservatives from the growing progressive element in the party.[14]

Back in the 1890s the Populists, with their radical notions of government-sponsored reforms, greatly alarmed those Republicans who were primarily interested in protecting the business and property interests of the wealthy. Populism was largely a movement of farmers who were struggling with hard economic times at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1892, they organized into an official party that represented a coalescing of a variety of reform movements, particularly the Farmers' Alliance, which promoted economic education and political action. In what became the country's largest third-party movement, the Populists called for far-reaching reforms that included the nationalization of railroads and telegraphs, unlimited coinage of silver in order to increase the amount of money in circulation, and the creation of a subtreasury plan to provide low-interest loans and build government warehouses to store grain. Other Populist demands included a progressive income tax, direct election of senators, and the initiative and referendum, causes later taken up and implemented by the Progressives.[15]

12. Quoted in Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt,* p. 436.

13. Quoted ibid.

14. Ibid., pp. 436–37.

15. William C. Pratt, "South Dakota Populism and Its Historians," *South Dakota History* 22 (Winter 1992): 309–10.

Under the leadership of Mark Hanna, McKinley's campaign manager and, later, senator from Ohio, the Republican Party circled its wagons to protect the wealth of the country, which lay principally in the hands of a few capitalists and industrialists. They characterized the proponents of populism as ignorant hicks because of the movement's rural roots in the South, Midwest, and West. When Democrats selected the populist-leaning William Jennings Bryan to carry the Democratic flag in the 1896 election, many Republicans labeled him a demagogue. Such was the opinion of William Allen White, editor of the *Emporia Gazette* and a Republican loyalist. In his famous editorial, "What's the Matter with Kansas?," White railed against Bryan and the Populists, writing,

> "There are two ideas of government," said our noble Bryan at Chicago. "There are those who believe that if you legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous, this prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic idea has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous their prosperity will find its way up and through every class and rest upon them."
>
> That's the stuff! Give the prosperous man the dickens! Legislate the thriftless man into ease, whack the stuffing out of the creditors and tell the debtors who borrowed the money five years ago when money "per capita" was greater than it is now, that the contraction of currency gives him a right to repudiate.
>
> Whoop it up for the ragged trousers; put the lazy, greasy fizzle, who can't pay his debts, on the altar, and bow down and worship him. Let the state ideal be high. What we need is not the respect of our fellow men, but the chance to get something for nothing.[16]

The editorial catapulted the colorful editor into the national spotlight and was widely disseminated as a McKinley campaign item. Even if money did not percolate upwards, as the Bryanites believed, many of the impulses and ideas of the Populists did. Gradually, the bubbles of populism began to appear within the Republican Party, principally with Roosevelt and several governors in the West and Midwest, especially Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin. Dressed in the finer garb

16. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 282.

of Republican fabric, the movement calling for government-sponsored reforms was now called "progressivism."[17]

William Allen White himself converted to the new wave of political thought. He had become acquainted with Roosevelt, who sent the editor his book, *American Ideals and Other Essays*. "I read it with feelings of mingled astonishment and trepidation," White acknowledged. "It shook my foundations, for it questioned things as they are. It challenged a complacent plutocracy. I did not dream that anyone, save the fly-by-night demagogues of Populism, had any question about the divine right of the well-to-do to rule the world. But that book was filled with an unsettling arraignment of the more predatory representatives of our American plutocracy. As a defender of the faith, I had met my first heretic."[18]

Roosevelt was no extremist. His advocacy of a "square deal" was just that—to be as fair as possible to all parties. Consequently, it would be inaccurate to label Roosevelt a "trust buster," especially when compared to his successor, William Howard Taft, who took a broader-brush approach to attacking large concentrations of wealth. Roosevelt considered trusts a natural outgrowth and necessary ingredient of a booming economy. When they got out of line they needed regulation, not dissolution. State governments, he believed, were not capable of dealing with corporations that spanned the country; only a strong national government could keep the large conglomerates in line. Later, in a 1910 speech, he would employ the phrase "New Nationalism" to formalize this belief.[19]

In Roosevelt's view, the railroads stood in particular need of oversight. Earlier in his presidency, he had signed a bill forbidding the practice of granting rebates, many of which were awarded secretly and generally favored large shippers. Following the 1904 election, he addressed the issue of uneven rates, which tendered favors along the same sliding scale as rebates. In so doing, he acquired the disfavor of many leading conservative senators, including his old ally, Henry Cabot Lodge of

17. Ibid., pp. 284–85; Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), pp. 244–47.

18. White, *Autobiography,* p. 299.

19. Hofstadter, *American Political Tradition,* pp. 228–32.

Massachusetts. Roosevelt strove for balance, however, insisting there should be "justice *to* the railroads as well as *from* the railroads."[20] After a long battle, in which he offended both die-hard conservatives and insurgent liberals, Roosevelt got his rate bill, known as the Hepburn Act.[21]

The president next took on the meatpacking industry, whose abuses Upton Sinclair had exposed in his 1906 novel, *The Jungle*. Having been a cattleman in Dakota Territory, Roosevelt took the issue to heart. In addition to the health dangers unfit foods posed for consumers, he did not want the reputation of farmers and ranchers to be tainted by the packers' unscrupulous practices. Roosevelt pushed for rigorous meat-inspection requirements but in the end accepted a compromise in the Wadsworth amendment to the 1906 agriculture appropriations bill. The passage of the meat inspection measure also prompted the House to pass a pure food bill, which the president signed at the same time.[22] Extremely pleased with the session, he wrote to a friend, "The railroad rate bill, meat inspection bill & pure food bill, taken together, mark a noteworthy advance in the policy of securing Federal supervision and control of corporations."[23]

Along with the strides he made in strengthening the regulatory power of the federal government, Roosevelt left a lasting legacy in the area of natural resource conservation. Not surprisingly, these accomplishments required that he fend off opposition from several directions. The Newlands Act, with its irrigation and land-reclamation projects, proved popular in the West, but ranchers, mine operators, lumbermen, and power companies viewed other environmental programs as an encroachment on their freedoms.[24]

After the election of 1904, Roosevelt named James R. Garfield, a devoted conservationist, to be secretary of the interior, followed in 1905 by the appointment of Gifford Pinchot to head the newly formed Forest Service. Pinchot's job description included the power to order the

20. Quoted in Brands, *T.R.,* p. 545.
21. Ibid., pp. 543–48.
22. Ibid., pp. 549–51; Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt,* pp. 459–462.
23. Quoted in Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt,* p. 462.
24. Ibid., p. 469.

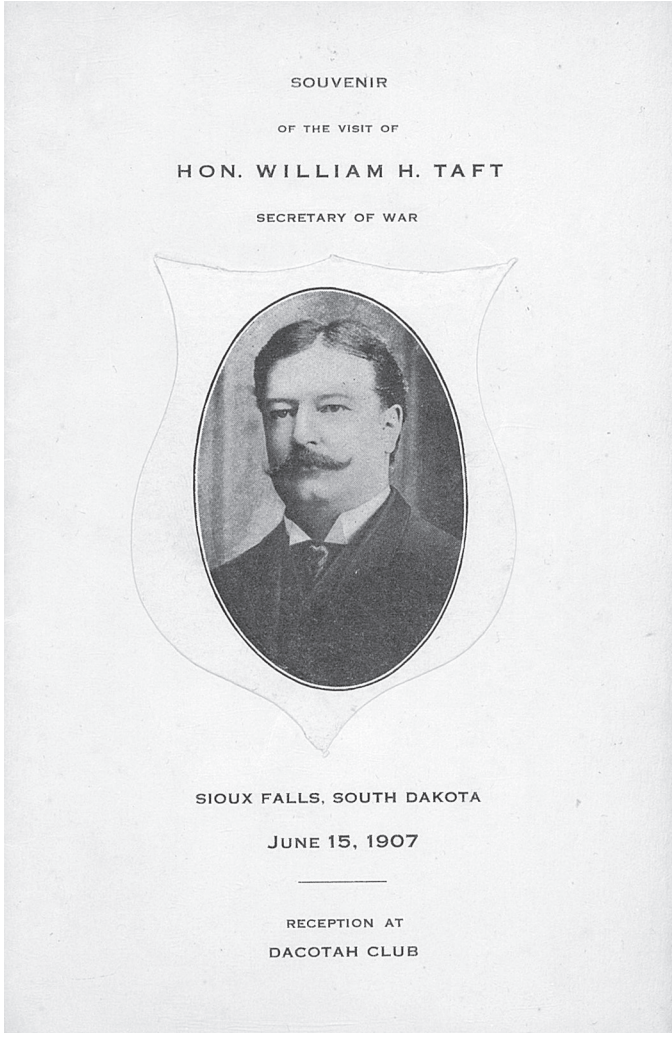
arrest of those who violated laws governing forest use, mineral rights, and grazing rights. He secured many indictments, including those of most of the Republican Party organization in Oregon after a senator attempted to thwart Roosevelt's environmental agenda. The lawmaker had attached a rider to the Department of Agriculture appropriations bill that forbade the creation or expansion of forest reserves in six western states without Congressional approval. A Congress made cantankerous by the president's exercise of power passed the bill easily. Roosevelt signed the measure, but not before instructing Pinchot to prepare an executive order effectively seizing some sixteen million acres. Later, Pinchot sparked more fury in Congress when he placed twenty-five hundred water-power sites in reserve by calling them ranger stations.[25]

Roosevelt maintained his offensive in May 1908 by calling governors, other leaders, and experts to a National Conservation Congress. Meeting in Washington, D.C., some five hundred individuals heard the president speak of the "right and the duty" of all Americans "to protect ourselves and our children against the wasteful development of our natural resources." The conference was measured a success, with forty-one states responding by establishing their own conservation commissions and programs.[26]

The president spent his last year in office exhorting Congress to pass numerous reforms. Among those called for in his annual message of December 1907 were "income and inheritance taxes, a federal incorporation law, the fixing of railroad rates based upon physical evaluation, federal regulation of railway stocks, currency reform, limitations on injunctions in labor disputes, extension of the eight-hour day and workmen's compensation laws, a postal savings bank and control of campaign contributions."[27] While he had little chance of achieving this extensive agenda aimed at regulating business and making sure the working man got a "square deal," Roosevelt looked for a successor who could carry on his work of leading the country out of the quagmire of old orthodoxies and onto the higher ground occupied by the Progressive movement.

25. Ibid., pp. 470–71.
26. Ibid., p. 471.
27. Ibid., pp. 486–87.

The president ultimately settled on the fifty-one-year-old William Howard Taft. Hailing from a prominent Ohio family, Taft had served with distinction as governor general of the Philippines and, later, as secretary of war. A gentle and noncombative fellow with a good legal mind, he had been a staunch supporter of President Roosevelt, who used his office to pull any number of strings to make sure that Taft



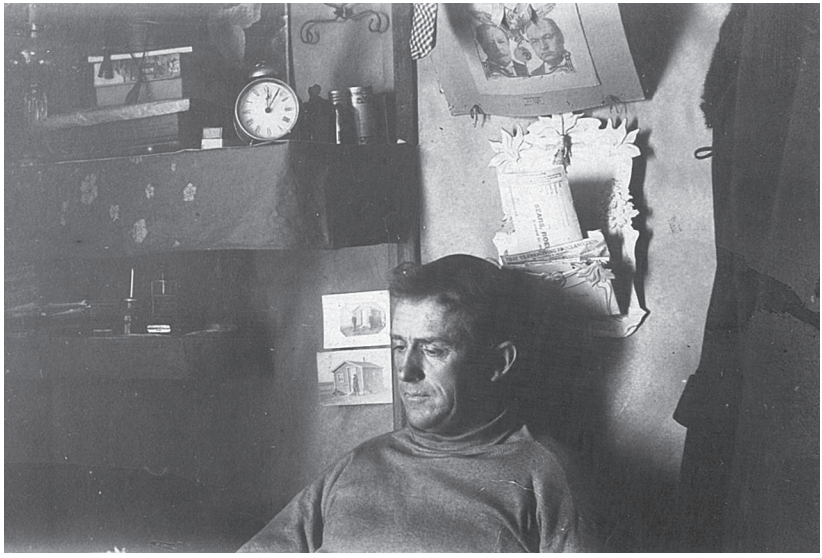
Four years after Roosevelt's trip through South Dakota, his hand-picked successor, William H. Taft, visited on the campaign trail.

would gain the Republican nomination. Once nominated, Taft, with some campaign coaching from Roosevelt on how to appear more engaging, went on to defeat William Jennings Bryan, who ran for president for the third and last time on the Democratic ticket.[28]

Roosevelt's Progressive philosophy caught on well in South Dakota, a state with a history of agrarian reformist tendencies. Populism had swept the state during the 1890s, when South Dakotans elected a Populist governor and sent two Populist representatives and one senator to Washington, D.C.[29] Thus, the stage was set for the entry of Coe I. Crawford into the political ring.

Known as the father of the Progressive awakening in South Dakota, Crawford grew up on a farm in northeastern Iowa and taught country school close to the homestead. Later, with a degree from the University of Iowa law school in hand, he made his way to Pierre, where he joined a thriving legal practice associated with the Western Town Lot Com-

28. Ibid., pp. 484–91.
29. Pratt, "South Dakota Populism," pp. 311–12.



A homesteader in northwestern South Dakota sits in his claim shack beneath a campaign poster promoting the Taft/Sherman ticket.

pany, a subsidiary of the Chicago & North Western Railroad. Crawford rose in Republican circles to serve in the first state legislature and as attorney general during the administration of Republican governor Charles H. Sheldon. After an unsuccessful run for Congress in 1896, he became the general counsel for the Chicago & North Western in South Dakota. Moving to the company's state headquarters in Huron, Crawford became part of the powerful railroad lobby. He sought to influence legislators and local officials with the usual tactics: granting free train passes, hosting elaborate banquets, and dispensing information on stocks. He also handled all tax matters between the company and the counties through which its rails ran. During these years, he worked hand-in-hand with Alfred Beard Kittredge, the titular head of the South Dakota Republican Party.[30]

Much like William Allen White, Crawford experienced a profound "conversion" to Progressivism. What prodding there may have been from without and what stirring there may have been from within to cause his transformation is unknown. In his book, *U.S. Senators from the Prairie,* Larry Pressler writes, "Despite (or perhaps because of) his position with Chicago and Northwestern, Crawford caught the progressive fever early."[31] He may have disapproved of the corporate practices he viewed as an insider. Others have wondered whether his break with the Republican regulars was more a product of spite than principle. Crawford may well have been miffed when party power brokers rejected him in favor of Kittredge to fill the Senate seat left vacant by the death of James H. Kyle in 1901. More likely, it was the popular appeal of Progressivism and Roosevelt's championing of the cause that made Crawford break with the past. In 1903, he parted company with the Chicago & North Western Railroad as well as the Republican machine headed by Kittredge.[32]

30. George F. McDougall, "Coe I. Crawford: 1907–1909," in *Over a Century of Leadership: South Dakota Territorial and State Governors,* ed. Lynwood E. Oyos (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1987), pp. 81–82; Armin, "Coe I. Crawford," p. 67.

31. Larry Pressler, *U.S. Senators from the Prairie* (Vermillion, S.Dak.: Dakota Press, 1982), p. 56.

32. McDougall, "Coe I. Crawford," p. 82; Armin, "Coe I. Crawford," pp. 64–70; Leon-

Crawford made his first bid for the governorship in 1904 but lost to conservative Samuel H. Elrod at the Republican state convention. Undaunted, he positioned himself for the election of 1906 and benefited when Governor Robert La Follette of Wisconsin toured South Dakota in 1905, spreading the Progressive gospel. The following year, Progressives wrested control of the state convention from the conservatives and nominated Crawford as their candidate for governor. As a part of his successful campaign, he pledged to rein in the railroads, a promise calculated to win the support of South Dakota's small shippers.[33]

Numerous reforms marked Crawford's term as governor from 1907 to 1909, a reflection of Roosevelt's belief in the need for governmental action to curb abuses and make life better for the average person. Spurred on by Crawford's leadership, the Progressive-dominated legislature flexed its muscles by passing a primary election law, which the Populists, followed by the Progressives, had long championed in order to reduce the influence of party bosses and give the people a greater voice in choosing their elected officials. The Crawford administration also oversaw the passage of a law that required lobbyists to register and made covert lobbying illegal. Fourteen measures were enacted that strengthened the regulation of railroads, including a ban on free passes, limits on work hours for employees of common carriers, mandated benefits for widows of railroad workers killed in the line of duty, a maximum passenger rate of two and one-half cents per mile, and higher corporate property taxes. Following the lead of Roosevelt on the national front, state lawmakers authorized a food and drug commission and a telephone commission and required public schools to provide students with free textbooks. They made progress on the moral front, too, with legislation that forbade baseball and theater on Sunday and required divorce-seekers to live in the state for one year before their marriages could be terminated.[34] Having accomplished at least the majority of his ambitious goals, Crawford set his sights on the United States Senate seat occupied by Alfred Kittredge.

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ard Schlup, "Coe I. Crawford and the Progressive Campaign of 1912," *South Dakota History* 9 (Spring 1979): 118.

33. Schlup, "Coe I. Crawford," p. 118.

34. McDougall, "Coe I. Crawford," pp. 82–83.

Governor Crawford could not have accomplished so complete a reform record without the help of a like-minded legislature. Robert S. Vessey, president of the state senate, was among the legislators who shared Crawford's Progressive principles. Vessey was a Wessington Springs banker who had also done well in the mercantile business, real estate, and cattle raising. He labored at public speaking but, at six feet in height, he had an imposing presence, a reputation for honesty, and the skills to guide Progressive legislation through the senate. In addition, he had a soft spot for moral issues, particularly temperance. Although the anti-prohibition forces were decidedly not in his corner, Vessey became the Republican candidate for governor in 1908.[35] According to his political creed, published in the *Kings Parker Press Leader* for 16 April 1908, the gubernatorial hopeful endorsed "Roosevelt's principles on economic questions, especially regarding government regulation of corporations and enforcement of law." He also called for state-backed guarantees of bank deposits, "equal taxation for all property," and "clean politics, where the people, not the corporations, rule."[36]

Vessey's Democratic opponent would be the former Populist governor, Andrew E. Lee, who faced an uphill battle. In the minds of most South Dakotans, Vessey, champion of reform that he was, stood somewhere to the right of Lee, making him the favorite of both the Republican reformers and conservatives.[37] Furthermore, by 1908, the coattails of William Jennings Bryan, who was seeking the presidency for the third and last time, were too tattered to pull Lee, or anyone, to victory.

The main showdown of the 1908 election season would be between the Republican governor and the Republican senator, each representing a different wing of the party. Crawford waved the Progressive flag, while Kittredge carried the conservative, or "Stalwart," banner. Partisans on both sides attempted to portray the candidates as wearing either black or white hats, but the candidates themselves sought hats fashioned in Roosevelt's "Rough Rider" style.[38]

35. Ernest Vessey and Fred Dunham, "Robert Scadden Vessey, 1909–1913," in *Over a Century of Leadership*, pp. 87–88.

36. *Kings Parker Press Leader*, 16 Apr. 1908.

37. Vessey and Dunham, "Robert Scadden Vessey," p. 87.

38. Armin, "Coe I. Crawford," pp. 101–5, 122–23.

Association with William Jennings Bryan on campaign paraphernalia like this button could not win another term for former Fusion governor Andrew E. Lee.

Kittredge would appear to have had less claim than Crawford to the title of Roosevelt loyalist, but he attempted to make the case nonetheless. In a letter to a constituent, he apologized for being unable to visit every community in the state, explaining, "For that reason I adopt this method of addressing an appeal to you and other friends who believe in the policies inaugurated by President Roosevelt, policies based on the square deal and the golden rule—principles that are not new but our President has made a new application of them."[39] In a Kittredge campaign leaflet entitled "The Roosevelt Policies," the senator detailed his support for measures that also had "President Roosevelt's vigorous support, backed by all the force of the President's strong personality." Kittredge did indeed vote favorably on a number of Roosevelt's programs. Listed second after the railway rate law, under the heading of "What the More Important Acts Provide," was one that held appeal for every farm family who hauled cream to town: "The oleomargarine law provides for a heavy tax upon oleomargarine that is sold in imitation of butter. It also contains provisions with regard to renovated butter and adulterated butter, and prohibits the coloring of the manufactured product so as to represent butter. It is clearly in the interests of the great dairying industry of the country."[40]

39. Kittredge to B. O. Whitlow, 29 May 1908, author's collection.
40. "The Roosevelt Policies," Kittredge campaign leaflet, 1908, author's collection.

The most interesting paragraph in Kittredge's leaflet relates to the senator's own railroad connections. It hints at both Roosevelt's aggressive stance in regard to the rail companies as well as the depth of hostility directed toward the industry on the part of many citizens. In a disclaimer that was also a simultaneous slap at Crawford, Kittredge stated: "Never in my life have I been the salaried attorney of any railroad or other corporation. Prior to the time when I became your senator, and while it was the business by which I earned my daily bread, I sometimes tried lawsuits for railroads, just the same as for an individual. From the first day of October, 1901, two months before I took my oath of office as a senator, I have had no business transactions with the railroads—no relations with them, direct or indirect, in any way, shape or form."[41]

Despite his attempts to disassociate himself from the rail interests, Kittredge could not shake his image as a stalwart conservative. His en-

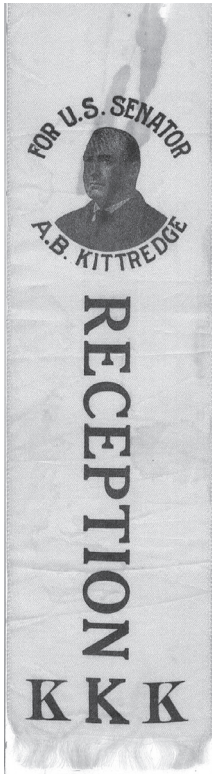
41. Ibid.

This campaign ribbon promoting Kittredge attempted to cultivate a friendly image.

dorsement by the Ku Klux Klan, which in South Dakota focused mainly on warning of sinister Roman Catholic intentions and the effects of promiscuous immigration policies, may not have helped his cause. Finally, Kittredge's matter-of-fact approach, in which brevity prevailed over verbosity, could not match the more strident tones or moral passion of those who saw in progressivism a cure for most social ills.[42]

By contrast, Crawford's appeal was enhanced by his obvious political kinship with Theodore Roosevelt and, to some extent, with Robert La Follette. As governor, Crawford had established an impressive record of reform. His candidacy fit the mood of the moment—a desire for change—and, unlike Kittredge, he enjoyed the advantage of not having

42. Ribbon with KKK endorsement of Kittredge for Senate, author's collection; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader,* 6 Apr. 1908.



The South Dakota branch of the Ku Klux Klan advertised its Stalwart sympathies with the endorsement of Kittredge.

been "spoiled" by time in Washington, D.C. When the Republicans met in Huron on 7 April 1908 for their state convention, the Progressives arrived well supplied with the greatest profusion of campaign items ever produced for a single day in the state's history. The Kittredge camp offered two pin-back political buttons, but the Crawford people came out with a set of six celluloid pin-backs, one of which may be the most mischievous political item ever created in South Dakota. It portrayed Roosevelt, Taft, and Crawford under the caption, "Theo. Wm. & Coe., Progressive Trio," with a rather uncomplimentary play on words, "Not Stalled Warts or 'I,'" an obvious insult to the Stalwarts as well as a declaration of the wearer's political views.[43]

Prior to the Republican state convention, the *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader* ran a long, stinging letter to the editor headlined "Crawford a Doomed Man." Referring to the Progressives as "insurgents," the writer, an F. M. Barnes of Minneapolis, Minnesota, characterized Crawford as an opportunist who, "by false statement, by innuendo, by every art and artifice known to those who practice and study political deceit . . . has sought to destroy the confidence of the people of the state of South Dakota in A. B. Kittredge." Crawford's chief transgression, in the editorialist's view, was having falsely accused Kittredge and the Stalwarts of opposing the Roosevelt administration and acting "against the party policies as announced and promulgated by Roosevelt in his messages, public utterances and state papers." In his attempt to discredit the incumbent senator, Crawford had reportedly abandoned "manly and becoming" discourse in favor of using pejorative epithets like "lobbyists," "corporation curs," and "links of the same sausage cut from the same dog" to describe his opponents. The people would not be fooled for long, however, the writer predicted. "They are thinking men. After the spell of the orator has passed, in the quiet of their homes, at their firesides, in their sunlit fields, they think things over. There they winnow out the chaff and look for the grain."[44]

Both of the opposing factions held rallies the night before the state convention. The Stalwarts met in the Huron opera house. Edward G.

43. Progressive campaign buttons, S.Dak. Republican Convention, 1908, author's collection.

44. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader,* 6 Apr. 1908.

Many of the Progressives' campaign buttons tried to sell multiple candidates as a package deal; a notable part of the package was Theodore Roosevelt, who was not on the ballot.

Kennedy of Sioux Falls, president of the conservative Roosevelt-Taft League, presided. The speakers included Eben W. Martin of Deadwood, former Governor Elrod of Clark, Charles Burke of Pierre, C. J. Buell of Rapid City, and Senator Kittredge. None of the speakers mentioned Crawford by name, and Kittredge assured those in attendance

that the convention fight was already won and "all that remained for the stalwarts to do was to go out and gather the roses in June."[45]

The Progressives met in the Huron city auditorium. The speakers were Governor Crawford, George W. Egan of Sioux Falls, Richard Olsen Richards of Huron, Charles H. Dillon of Yankton, R. C. Vessey of Wessington Springs, Congressman Philo Hall, and Wilbur S. Glass of Watertown. The only sour note of the caucus was provided by the flamboyant George Egan, who called Senator Kittredge a "rascal."[46]

45. Ibid., 7 Apr. 1908.
46. Ibid.

Like his Progressive opponents, Kittredge, too, was anxious to be linked with the name of Roosevelt. This ribbon was made by a Stalwart political organization.

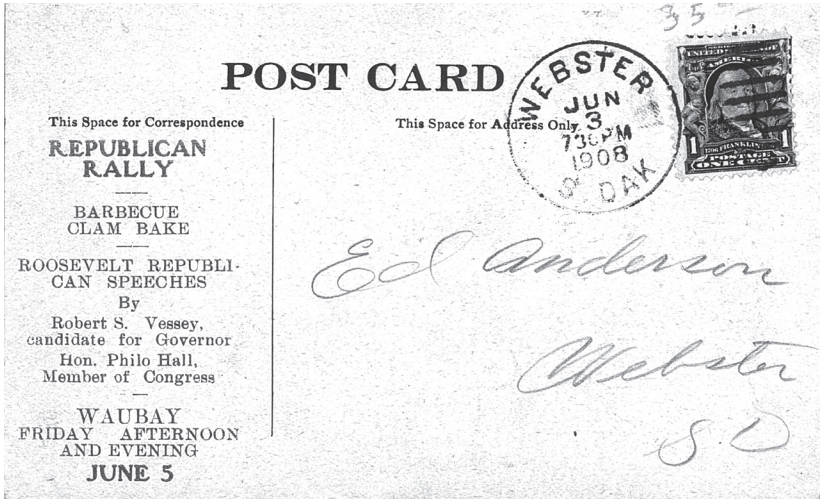
The Progressives quickly took over the convention the following day and excluded all Stalwarts from service on the various committees. That move eliminated the entire Black Hills delegation from committee membership. The Progressive faction also rearranged the seating, awarding themselves the center and relegating their opponents to chairs around the edge of the hall, a bit of salt that the Stalwarts swallowed "good naturedly." The Stalwart opposition did succeed in dividing the resolutions endorsing Crawford for senator and Taft for president. No Stalwart voted for Crawford, but both factions supported the Taft endorsement. Another spark of unanimity flared briefly when attorney George Egan was called to speak. At that point, reported the *Argus-Leader,* "there was a storm of 'No's' about equally divided between the insurgents and the stalwarts," and Egan left the building "crestfallen." With his flowing mane and pompous personality, the politically ambitious Egan was an easy target for ridicule. Delegates later had more fun at the attorney's expense when they established a haircut fund for him.[47]

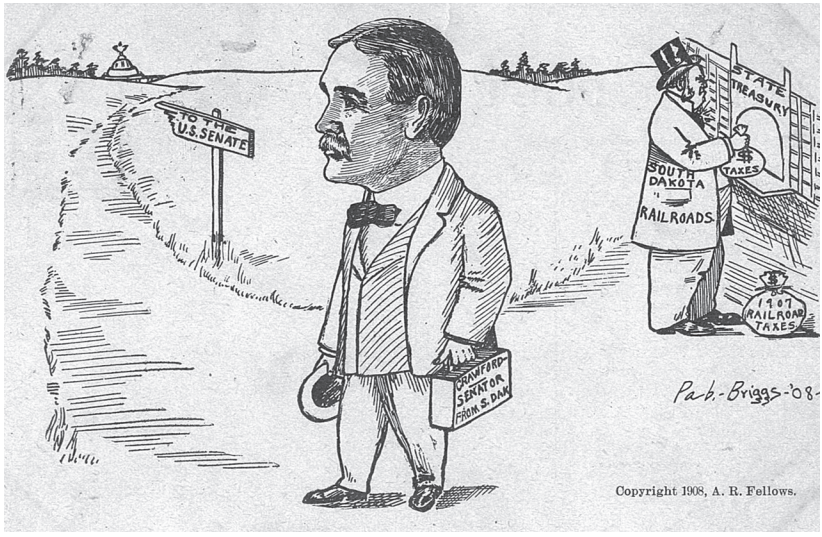
The glue that held the contesting Republican factions together was Theodore Roosevelt. The assembly unanimously passed a resolution declaring "the policies of President Roosevelt to be the crowning virtues of all achievements of the republican party." Another set forth "the need for equal rights of all before the law" and proclaimed that the "'righteousness that exalteth a nation' and their continuation are essential to the welfare of mankind." The convention-goers favored the nomination of Roosevelt for president, "but in view of his refusal" emphatically endorsed Secretary Taft who "would carry on the work inaugurated by President Roosevelt, and who is in full sympathy with his policies."[48]

Roosevelt's dominance of the convention and the 1908 primary campaign is captured in a simple picture postcard advertising a Republican rally to be held at Waubay on 5 June. A drawing shows Crawford heading for the United States Senate, while in the background South

47. Ibid., 9 Apr. 1908. *See also* ibid., 8 Apr. 1908. For more on Egan's legal career and political machinations, *see* Lynwood E. Oyos, "George W. Egan: The Demagogue Who Would Be Governor," *South Dakota History* 36 (Fall 2006): 292–317.

48. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader,* 7 Apr. 1908. *See also* ibid., 9 Apr. 1908.



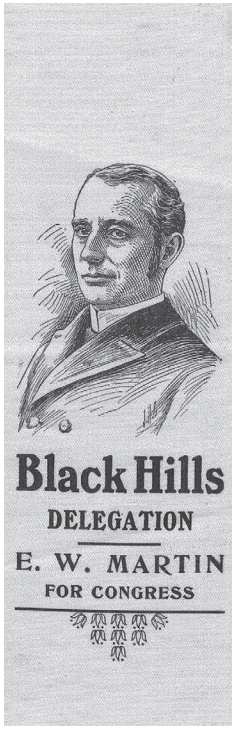


This postcard advertised a Republican rally with a barbecue, clam bake and "Roosevelt Republican speeches." Coe Crawford is shown heading to the Senate while the railroads reluctantly pay their taxes.

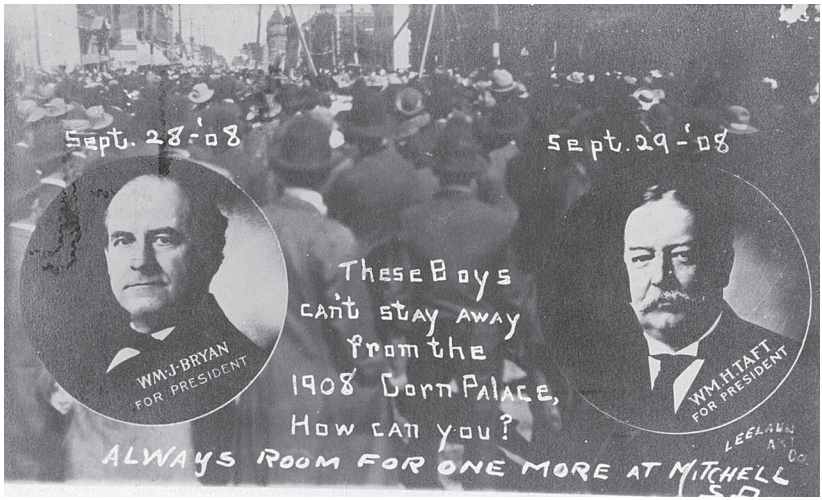
Dakota's railroads stand at the window of the state treasury, grudgingly paying their taxes. The reverse side notes that rally-goers would be treated not only to a barbeque and clambake, but also to "Roosevelt Republican Speeches" by gubernatorial candidate Robert Vessey and Congressman Philo Hall.[49]

The battle of the Republicans continued in South Dakota's first primary election, held 9 June. Progressive Coe Crawford narrowly defeated Stalwart Alfred Kittredge, garnering 35,151 votes to the incumbent's 33,086. Robert Vessey also won a slim primary victory over John L. Browne in the Republican primary for governor, 32,024 to 30,860. Two conservative Republican congressional candidates, however, fared better in the primaries. Charles Burke and Eben Martin edged out incumbent Philo Hall and challenger Wilbur S. Glass.[50]

49. Postcard publicizing Republican rally, 5 June 1908, author's collection.
50. South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (1909), pp. 340–42.



The results of the 1908 Republican primaries were split; despite the election of progressive gubernatorial and senatorial candidates, the party chose two Stalwarts, including Eben W. Martin of Deadwood, to run for the House of Representatives.



Presidential candidates William Jennings Bryan and William H. Taft campaigned on successive days at the Mitchell Corn Palace.

By the time South Dakotans voted in the November election, they knew that a vote cast for Taft was a vote for Roosevelt. When Taft visited Mitchell on 29 September 1908, he centered his speech on the "Roosevelt policies," implying that he would be a carbon copy of the president.[51] Voters had every reason to believe that a ballot cast for Crawford and Vessey was a tribute to Roosevelt, as well. Consequently, Taft carried South Dakota easily, winning 58.8 percent of the votes to Bryan's 35.1 percent. The state legislature honored the results of the June primary and confirmed Crawford as senator. Vessey handily defeated the Democratic candidate for governor, Andrew Lee, by a vote of 62,989 to 44,837. The Democratic candidates for Congress both suffered major defeats at the hands of Republican Stalwarts Eben Martin and Charles Burke.[52]

In 1908, Theodore Roosevelt loomed larger in South Dakota politics than if he had bought property, paid taxes, and shopped for gro-

51. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader,* 29 Sept. 1908.

52. American Presidency Project, "The Election of 1908," http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/elections.php, accessed 28 Jan. 2010; South Dakota, *Legislative Manual* (1909), pp. 360, 363; Armin, "Coe I. Crawford," p. 138.

ceries in the state. Even though he did not visit South Dakota during the election year, his name was invoked and his policies praised with such regularity that the trip was unnecessary. With the election of Taft, Crawford, and Vessey, all of whom had a tight grip on the popular president's coattails, Roosevelt had carried South Dakota once again. His legacy would continue into the 1920s with the election of Progressives Peter Norbeck and William McMaster to the offices of governor and United States senator. In fact, South Dakota Republicans sought Roosevelt's coattails one more time in the 1920 election, when their campaign literature included a quotation from the former president crediting South Dakota and its Republican leaders with doing "more for genuine progressive legislation than any other state in the Union."[53]

53. "A Heart to Heart Talk with the Voters of South Dakota," Republican State Committee campaign leaflet, 1920, author's collection.

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