

Politics in the Early Sixties

--from notes by H. C. Bailey

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The presidential election of 1860 found three tickets in the field and

politics in a general muddle. For years there had been two wings in the democratic party. The northern under the leadership of Broderick, a brave, able and uncompromising leader (killed in a duel by Judge Terry); the southern wing lead by Terry and Senator Quinn (made a duke under Maximilian in Mexico during his occupancy).

When the Charleston connection split and the anti-slavery element nominated Douglas, he was endorsed by the anti and Breckinridge by the pro slavery wing. The result was a three cornered fight, well seasoned with enthusiasm. Abolitionism was not popular in California and all claiming to be republicans were classed as such. I

I have no means of ascertaining the vote of the State, but that is immaterial in voting the gradual crystallization of California politics to the present status.

As the slavery agitation increased and secession agitated, the two elements (for there really were but two--all others were side issues) slowly but surely began to array themselves definitely and to become more closely allied by a common unanimity of sympathy and sentiment.

So clear cut was the issue that those attempting to hold middle ground in a few years were by stress of conditions compelled to declare for one or the other party. The whole Douglas element had to be absorbed by the other two, the republicans getting, I think, not less than 90 percent, turning a large democratic majority to a rather small minority in northern California, except a few localities, southern California remained Secesh all south of Tehachapi.

When the issue was forced to a decision the results were often far from pleasant. Men who had opposed and fought democracy all their lives had to

fall into line, and others who had been democratic, wheel horses all their lives, had to turn against old comrades and fellow workers. The process was completed at the election in 63. The Douglas democrats were never heard of after that election.

As the war progressed the animosity and bitter feeling increased. There was much foolish talk calculated to increase the bitterness. The forming of secret societies on both sides was a cause of unrest to all level headed, well meaning men, regardless of personal preferences. Fortunately that element was powerful enough to hold the less responsible and fanatical element in control. The only democratic paper in northern California which was not raided or thrown out on the street, was saved in Marysville through republican influence.

Such was the political situation as near as I can recall it in 1862. Sectional prejudice ran rampant and down all opposition. Even a negro church in Stockton split on the nigger question. The few negroes here at that time were divided same as the whites and were quite, if not more acrimonious, than the white brother.

The first year's results of the war were thought by the Secesh to assume final success. And as a demonstration of that faith and a kind of reunion or calling together of the southern element, a grand southern barbecue was planned to be held at Marysville on strictly old style southern lines, by the four adjoining counties, and as many more as wanted to take part.

A quarter of a mile of barbecue pits were dug and other preparations accordingly. Beeves, fat hogs and sheep were driven in without stint. The old California spirit was aroused and when the love and pride of the old home with its longed for and hollowed associations were added spiced with the prevailing enmity (it is the right word) and confidence of final success, the enthusiasm knew no bonds and to contribute was considered more a privilege than a hardship.

About twenty negroes were engaged to do the barbecueing (all Secesh--

they would allow no black republican ducky on the ground. In the afternoon before the meeting the roasting began and was continued all night and till afternoon next day. A large speakers' stand was put up and a large plot of ground seated with rough lumber.

The best speakers were engaged, the chief speaker being Tod Robinson, called the old man eloquent, Jim Crothforth and others. Leaving out the subject, Robinson gave the grandest display of oratory I ever heard. The crowd was estimated at twenty to twenty five thousand and so intense was the feeling that brought that great crowd together they met and commingled more like old neighbors than strangers. Unanimity of feeling and sentiment destroyed all formalities. One addressed another he never saw before with the same familiarity and confidence on what was uppermost in all minds, the same as an old acquaintance.

Enthusiasm ran wild. I have never seen so many gathered together with one accord, and with such unanimity of sentiment.

A large circus took advantage of the occasion; also the theater had out flaming posters and various side shows all over town.

Crothforth was to speak at corner opposite the U. S. Hotel in front of the western. Before the time to speak the streets were packed and an awning in front of the U. S. was also packed.

Just before speaking time the awning which was supported on cast iron posts fell with its load of humanity. The street below was packed and I expected one hundred were killed (I was one hundred feet away). Such a scene of confusion, I never saw before nor since. As usual all in sight wanted to get there first. As soon as possible the injured were got into the hotels and the crowd followed till it threatened to collapse and the building had to be cleared and guarded by the police till system could be brought out of the chaos.

I never saw so much anxiety and confusion and excitement crowded into

one hour as the one after the accident. No one knew how many were killed or injured, nor was it possible to find out till the report was made. All who had friends and were separated and did not know where they were was well nigh wild. The tension was terrible with men running to the circus, theater, anywhere and everywhere.

In less than two hours the hotel people had a list of all the injured and gave out that all could see their friends, then for nearly another hour there was a jam at the hotel entrance.

When it was all summed up there was only nineteen seriously hurt and one killed outright and that was a lady. Had both legs and both arms broken. The awning was hinged to the wall and in its fall swung clear of those below. About fifteen were badly hurt and had to stay from one to two weeks before going home. My wife's brother and wife stayed near three weeks.

Here the California instincts cropped out again. Always ready to take up a collection. A subscription was immediately started and liberally signed that all the injured should have the best care the city could give. In fact with home folks they were almost lionized. And I am not sure some of them did not think the consideration shown them made full restitution for the suffering.

Did the man or woman ever live that did not enjoy a little lionizing. I doubt it.

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