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Illinois Agrarianism and Shelby Moore Cullom

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ILLINOIS AGRARIANISM

and

SHELBY MOORE CULLOM

(TITLE)

BY

RICHARD F. WELLS

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	1 - 7
Chapter I. Cullom's Formative Years and Early Years in Politics	8 - 35
Chapter II. The Election of 1876 Through the Railroad Strike of 1877	36 - 58
Chapter III. The Governorship 1878 - 1883	59 - 82
Chapter IV. Cullom's Thirty Years in the United States Senate	83 - 108
Bibliography	109 - 111

PREFACE

As post bellum Illinois grew to new heights in prosperity, the rural community remained the most productive force in this more abundant society. The census of 1870 showed Illinois fourth in population among the thirty-one states of the nation. There were 2,539,891 citizens in the state. Farm production was on the rise. Total agricultural wealth for Illinois in 1869-70 was listed at \$210,860,585. During this same period farmers produced 1,715,586 head of cattle; 30,128,405 bushels of wheat; 42,780,851 bushels of oats; 129,921,395 bushels of corn; 11,267,431 bushels of potatoes; \$47,003,655 in dairy products; and 5,739,249 pounds of wool plus huge amounts of barley, rye, hay, tobacco, orchard products, and sorghum. In total agricultural production, Illinois was second only to New York State.¹ By 1875 Illinois was the leading state across the nation in the production of corn, oats, and hay. Agricultural growth became a spiraling trend upward with Chicago rapidly becoming its center of commerce. Quickly stockyards, grain markets, meat packers, reaper manufacturers, and steel mills sprung up or expanded in Chicago to capitalize on this increased production of Illinois farmers. But as the pace of Illinois agricultural production grew the agrarian community's per capita wealth fell. Chicago businessmen were transferring

¹ Richard Bardolph, Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, XLI (March, 1948), pp. 244 and 246.

the production of farmers into personal profits. The well organized corporate structures of the city were exploiting the individualistic, rural, agrarian. The result was a feeling of frustration in downstate Illinois.

The Illinois farmer needed help so he turned to the sympathetic ear of Shelby Moore Cullom, who during the post-war era of the 1870's and early 1880's would be a powerful advocate for the interests of Illinois agrarianism. Farmers would find Cullom's agrarianism compatible with their own thinking. Cullom wanted to change but not revolutionize this sometimes dubious system called democracy. Cullom and the farmers recognized in spite of undesirable economic conditions there were still many positive aspects to life on the Illinois prairie. Both knew the Illinois situation was better than that in states like Kansas and Nebraska. For this reason they were more docile than their brothers in states further west. Cullom and the farmer both knew Illinois had fewer drouths, better soil, closer markets, a larger and more stable population, stronger currency, more and cheaper transportation, a better established government, and greater capacity to produce agriculturally because of the industrial complex in Chicago.

The purpose of this paper then, is to trace in Illinois the growth of agrarianism through the political actions of Shelby Cullom. It has been attempted here to carry on a discussion similar to those found in the series, Library

of American Biography. Through Cullom's actions is expressed an attitude unique to Illinois. A convenient text in this study was James Warren Nielson's, Shelby M. Cullom, Prairie State Republican.

The primary emphasis will be during his years as Governor of Illinois from 1877-1883. These were important years for the Illinois farmer, because he was learning to use moderation in relation to social change. In the early and mid 1870's a small percentage of Illinois agrarians had tried to organize their prairie brethren into a militant farmer organization called the Patrons of Husbandry. The movement, however, failed and now the Illinois farmers moved closer to Cullom's views. As a legislator, congressman, governor, and United States Senator, Cullom attempted to protect farmers from the profit motives of big business and preserve a personal and economic autonomy on the Illinois prairie.

In Cullom, the agrarian community had a man who understood their problems. Cullom was raised on a farm and learned the early tasks of clearing land and breaking sod. Like the Illinois farmer his thought processes were agrarian-oriented. An example was the truck bill he refused to sign as Governor of Illinois in 1879. This was a bill designed to stop the issuance of scrip to coal miners in company towns. Cullom thought he would jeopardize the laborers' individual freedom

to bargain for wages by signing the bill. He compared the labor situation to the master-servant relationship of his own youth on the prairie when bargaining took place on an individual basis. He failed to recognize the new realities of corporate structures and their indifference to the problems of labor.

Cullom's world was heavily laced with Jeffersonian Democracy, an attitude that the government that governed least governed best. This concept was still strongly accepted in Cullom's boyhood Illinois. The prairie around Cullom's home in Tazewell County had not yet faced the problem of greater centralized government. As a public official Cullom was thrifty with the taxpayers money, because he knew the economic burdens of bank foreclosures and mortgages. Cullom liked to think he was a progressive when he supported measures like the Illinois-Michigan and Hennepin Canals. He recognized the canals importance for shipping goods to and from market as essential to the welfare of everyone. He saw agriculture as basic to Illinois prosperity like most farmers then and even now. He was suspicious of big business and its lust for power through profits. He resented, like the agrarian, their attempts to hoard the wealth and dictate public policy. He was moralistically self righteous, another manifestation of the early prairie, as he condemned the Mormons for their polygamous marriages in Utah. He was not well-educated, because the better schools were in the East, so he relied upon common sense and a probing skepticism for **answers** in public life. He moved cautiously toward new ideas. Life

on the early prairie was hazardous and so the temptation was to say if it was good enough for Dad then it's good enough for me.

Like the Illinois farmer he advocated only moderate changes. The result was a relatively weak Railroad and Warehouse Commission to stop abuses by railroads while he was in state government and an Interstate Commerce Act as United States Senator that attempted to do essentially the same limited thing. This act was more precedent-setting than harsh. Railroad regulation was probably his most lasting achievement as a public official, but even here his was the moderate approach. He desired order, but he also desired individual autonomy. Most of his public life would be spent in the pursuit of honest and efficient government.

As the social and economic structures of society grew he would resist the progressives' attempt to expand the role of government. Like the Illinois farmer he did not realize the need for government to be large and powerful if it wished to preserve order and justice. Powerful social and economic structures necessitated a like response from government with a kind of balance of power being achieved in American society.

In the last years of his public life America was no longer the small personal rural society of Cullom's formative years, the 1830's and 1840's. It had become a large impersonal urban society of the twentieth century. Cullom would not recognize this change and government's need to react. He believed such

action by government would only jeopardize the peoples' basic freedom, not insure them. Cullom knew strong governments historically as a threat to the peoples' well being and freedom.

In the final analysis Cullom's greatest achievements were not in the record of legislation he left behind, or the actions he took in public office. They were in attitudes that have become unique not only to Illinois, but also to the American experience. Cullom's career represented,

The constantly recurring warfare between reform and the status quo, between individual aggression and cooperation in welfare, placed the Middle West in its uncomfortable and highly unsatisfying role of battleground; therefore it produced the most unhappy and significant class of politicians in the America of their day, the 'fence-sitters.'... This type returned to Washington year after year... and always remained targets of eastern conservatives and western radicals. In them the conflict between the old 'conscience' of agricultural America and the new ruthlessness of industrial America found its most complete embodiment, for they were hypersensitive to the shifting status and uncertain outlook of their section...

Politicians of their type, functioning for the Middle West at Washington, in reality functioned for the nation at large, because they typified the compromise which is the peculiar characteristic of America's qualified type of democracy--a compromise which has seemed essential to the preservation of the middle class in capitalistic America, the preservation of opportunity, of security, and of the ability to cope with circumstances. ²

This was Shelby Moore Cullom.

² Jeannette Nichols and James Garfield Randall, Democracy in the Middle West (New York, 1941), 84-86.

CHAPTER I
CULLOM'S FORMATIVE YEARS
and
EARLY YEARS IN POLITICS

The purpose of this first chapter is to show how Cullom's life progressed from a youth on the Illinois prairie to his last term in the state legislature. Here an effort has been made to pick out those parts of his early years that had the profoundist impact on formulating this agrarian attitude he manifested in office. Consequently when Cullom finally left home to go out into the world of politics and law, he carried with him these attitudes formulated on the Illinois prairie.

During the time of this chapter which covers the first forty-six years of his life, Cullom would serve one term as a District Attorney of Springfield, four terms in the Illinois House of Representatives, and three terms in Washington D.C. as a Congressman. In all, Cullom had sixteen years of public office before he became governor. This then is how Shelby Cullom's life began.

Early in the nineteenth century the westward movement of settlers into Kentucky included Richard Northcraft Cullom, from Maryland, and Elizabeth Coffey, from North Carolina. In a beautiful valley near the banks of the Cumberland River in Southern Kentucky, they met, courted, and married. They remained in the blue grass state until the birth of their seventh (of twelve) child, Shelby Moore Cullom on November 22, 1829. The Cullom family left Wayne County, Kentucky for Illinois in the spring of 1830. Little is known about why

Richard Cullom decided to take his family and leave Kentucky except for Shelby Cullom's statement that his father disliked the institution of slavery, which then existed in Kentucky. Richard Cullom was fairly prosperous, and he easily absorbed the financial burden connected with moving. Together with his brothers-in-law Alfred Phillips and William Brown, Richard Cullom and his family made their way from Kentucky into Tazewell County , near the town of Washington, in central Illinois. ³

In this sparsely populated prairie community Shelby Cullom grew to manhood. His early years were the same as other boys of that age on the frontier. He knew the tedium of farm chores, the long walks to school over rough country roads, and the hazardous unpredictability of the forces of nature. Cullom's agrarian attitudes sprung from this backwoods environment. Here, it was believed, a man could grow in affluence without corrupting his integrity. In antebellum Illinois it was believed that the farm was the bedrock of everything wholesome, constructive, and permanent. This principle was essentially a manifestation of Jeffersonian Democracy. Jefferson said: "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God." ⁴ He believed the man who owned

³ James Warren Nielson, Shelby M. Cullom, Prairie State Republican (Champaign, Ill., 1962), p.1.

⁴ Charles A. Beard, Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy (New York, 1915), pp. 423-424.

his own land, tilled the soil by himself, and looked to nature for sustenance, invariably developed an independence of character which corresponded to economic independence.

Life on the prairie was not easy, but it did seem fulfilling for those who could meet its challenges of bad weather, illness, bank foreclosures, railroad exploitation, high tariffs, and land speculation. The people who met these rigorous requirements were rugged people who showed a strong sense of personal identity with the prairie, and Shelby Cullom was one of them. Their society was built around people with rugged bodies and strong convictions: prerequisites for survival. It was where the weak failed, but to those who stayed and succeeded it was a most satisfying experience. Surviving the arduous challenges of the Illinois prairie was an achievement in itself. This gave purpose and meaning to their existence.

As he grew, however, Cullom became discontented with life on the farm and began to desire something more. Farmwork was arduous and boring to him. There was a tendency in the Cullom character to live a more genteel life than that of the prairie. Cullom seemed too sensitive for the harshness of the frontier. He would share its attitudes, but not its experiences. Life on the prairie seemed too dull to stimulate his mind as well as his senses. He was unable emotionally to adapt to its hardships. His temperament seemed to prefer mental in contrast to physical activity.

But he learned much from the frontier. This world of long hours under a hot summer sun and cold winter snows left Cullom with a strength and perseverance characteristic of the prairie. He would transfer these into great dedication as a public servant in later years. With an almost Calvinistic spirit he worked behind the turbulent scenes of politics for what in his mind were the principles of good government rather than self interest like so many other people in public life.

Upon finishing his education in the subscription schools of the area, schools provided by the local residents, Cullom became a school teacher. He hoped to earn and save enough money by teaching to continue his education. But teaching proved financially unrewarding. He then returned to the farm and borrowed a team of five oxen from his father to begin breaking ground for neighboring farmers. Fortunately this venture was more profitable than teaching. It also demonstrated to Cullom the wealth that was attainable from the soil. The rich Illinois earth was always a source of income to Cullom in his early years. Now he possessed the necessary finances to further his education at Rock River Seminary in Mount Morris, Illinois.⁵

His trip to Mount Morris was difficult and only deserves

⁵ Shelby Moore Cullom, Fifty Years of Public Service (Chicago, 1911), p. 5.

telling, because of the profound effect it had on his future health and its portrayal of the Illinois frontier. The trip was not difficult until he boarded a stagecoach at Peru which was to take him to Dixon. The weather was bad, and the driver became lost in a blinding snowstorm. As the situation became worse it was necessary for Cullom to get out of the coach and run alongside the horses to keep them on the road. Later he said it was twelve miles between Peru and Dixon. In reality it is about forty-five miles. Unfortunately, the strain of the trip overtaxed his heart, resulting in his having a leaky heart valve throughout the remainder of his life. This heart condition often induced fainting spells and was embarrassing to a man of his character. The trip showed the strength of this young man from the prairie, and probably had a tremendous effect on Cullom's thinking. This event made him more aware of the dangers involved in travel at this time. As a public servant, in later years, Cullom would support legislation for more railroad regulations, canals, and better land roads to combat these appalling conditions of travel.

Rock River Seminary was a most satisfying experience for Cullom. It was the attainment of his ambition. The school was run by the Methodist Church, and Cullom's parents were devout Methodists.⁶ They were very pleased that their son attended the institution. Cullom later said, Rock River Seminary was

⁶ Springfield, Illinois State Register, January 29, 1914

only a third rate college when compared to the better schools in the East. At the time, however, it was the finest school in Northern Illinois. At Rock River, Cullom sought an education to prepare him for a career in law. In reality he probably received a more classical education with little actual preparation for becoming a lawyer. The knowledge he acquired at Rock River would not contribute greatly to a more realistic understanding of society. Being a religious school, it emphasized a strong sense of morality among its students. The religious training he received taught a moral code based upon absolutes of right and wrong. For Cullom and the prairie preachers there would be no shades of gray, and the Bible became the source of all truth. The possibility that morals change according to time and culture never really entered his mind. Cullom was a product of the prairie and in many ways would be like the Illinois farmer, a self righteous, hardheaded individual who found his understandings of life through the nineteenth century fundamentalist approach to religion. This strong moralistic attitude of Cullom's would be apparent in later years when he attacked the polygamy of the Mormons in Utah and moralistically condemned the South's leaders for secession in the Civil War.

Cullom was well accepted by his classmates at Mount Morris and chosen President of the Amphictyon Society. ⁷

⁷ Cullom, p. 7.

This was an organization of ancient Greek derivation somewhat similar to the present day student council. To Cullom the most appealing part of his education at Rock River was the companionship of fellow students. Like Cullom, many of the students were residents of Illinois and only reinforced Cullom's own attitudes with their own. The problem with much of the dialogue that Cullom joined in with his classmates was that it brought in few new ideas not indigenous to Illinois agrarianism. Most of his classmates could only express what they learned from essentially the same kind of environment as Cullom.

In later years, several students, including Cullom, would achieve considerable personal distinction. Among those were Robert Hitt who became Secretary of the legation at Paris during the Grant Administration and at another time a member of the United States House of Representatives; Moses Hallet, a United States Judge in Colorado; and John Rawlins, a General under Grant during the war and Secretary of War in Grant's Administration. Two of these three, Hitt and Rawlins were among Cullom's closest friends at Rock River. Both Hitt and Rawlins stimulated Cullom intellectually. Hitt was the son of the headmaster at Rock River and a religious agnostic. He even created some doubts in Cullom's moralistic mind toward religion. Rawlins was a very good student of politics, and Cullom learned much about his future vocation from Rawlins. ⁸

⁸ Cullom, p. 11.

Cullom's education at Rock River was weak; the better schools were in the East. Like Cullom, Rock River Seminary was a product of its own environment. Surrounded by rich farm land, small towns, and anti-intellectual inhabitants, its instructors were subject to many of the same influences as Cullom. Railroads in the early 1850's were few, and Chicago was still a small trading center. The development as well as the need of a more urban-oriented, industrial-minded philosophy, at that time, was inconceivable. In the East many educators had the advantage of teaching a more progressive education, because their environment was permeated by the trends of future America, urbanization and industrialization. It is, therefore, possible to understand why Cullom held many of the views he did as a result of such training.

After two years at Rock River Cullom found it necessary to leave school because of ill health. Back on the farm he quickly regained his strength, and this could only convince him of how much better the country life was over the city life for one's health. But again the work was hard and distasteful compared to what he wished to do with his life. In the spring of 1853 he made plans to study law at Springfield and informed his father of this decision. He had leased from his father a 160 acre plot of land that he planned to cultivate. He now requested release from this obligation which his father promptly granted him.

In October 1853, upon the advice of his father [who once held public office in the state legislature and state senate]⁹ Cullom went to the law office of Abraham Lincoln, an old friend of his father, to study law. Although genuinely pleased to see the son of an old friend, Lincoln told young Cullom he was away a great deal of the time defending clients around the circuit and could not give him the necessary attention for studying law. Lincoln advised Cullom to go to the law office of John Stuart and Benjamin Edwards and there make a similar request. Cullom followed Lincoln's advice and was accepted by the partnership of Stuart and Edwards which was one of the most respected law firms in Illinois.

This had been Cullom's first real contact with Lincoln. The image of Lincoln loomed over Cullom the rest of his life. Cullom had the most profound faith and respect for Lincoln. No one personified more than Lincoln such prairie state traits as struggle, strength, perseverance, and endurance.

For the next two years Cullom studied law under the guidance of Stuart and Edwards and in 1855 he passed his bar examination. He immediately ran for and won the office of city attorney of Springfield. As city attorney Cullom received his first legal experience prosecuting people for selling

⁹ Neilson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p. 3.

alcohol in Springfield. He was aided in this provincial puritanistic attack against the violators of liquor ordinances by Benjamin Edwards who was a temperance man. In later years as a congressman and senator, Cullom always favored high taxes on liquor. He was not a prude about alcohol, but he did seem somewhat hostile to its use. These experiences as city attorney and possibly the Civil War where its use was excessive probably induced this sentiment. Drinking, at that time, had bad connotations among responsible members of society like Cullom. It often meant shiftlessness, laziness, and irresponsibility. A man from the prairie like Cullom could never condone these traits, because on the prairie such behavior could mean disaster for a man and his family. Then in December, 1855, feeling somewhat more secure economically because of his new position as city attorney, Cullom married Miss Hannah Fischer.

Records for the presidential election year of 1856 show Cullom being chosen an elector on a fusion ticket. This fusion party, the Whig-American-Freesoil Fillmore Ticket, also supported him as a candidate from Sangamon County for the Illinois House of Representatives.¹⁰ This was the first time Cullom made any political speeches. The inspiration for this move was an important function of many lawyers, since it involved

¹⁰ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p. 5.

the process of making laws. Secondly, his father probably influenced him in the direction of politics from childhood. Running from Sangamon County was a good move politically for Cullom. He was a prominent man in Springfield. His early environmental background would blend well with the people of Sangamon County, and he, no doubt, made important political contacts through people like his father and Lincoln. Cullom won, but his first term in office was not very exciting. Like all incoming members of the legislature he was at the bottom of the seniority list for committee assignments. Consequently he found himself on such relatively obscure committees as Claims and Elections.¹¹ The first bill he introduced did show a natural instinct for politics. He proposed an act to bring an insurance company into Sangamon County. This was an astute move politically. It would bring added wealth into Sangamon County and please his constituents. Eventually the Sangamo Insurance Company was established in Springfield with the rights to insure marine vessels and freight shipments made by land or water. A more subtle interpretation of Cullom's motives in connection with his insurance bill gives credence to his sensitivity for the safeguards of agriculture, since transportation was so important to farmers and a program to protect transportation would also

¹¹ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p. 5.

protect farmers. Capital for the new company was set at \$100,000.00 and shares with a par value of \$50.00 were sold. 12

In the state legislature Cullom championed agriculture as the basic industry of Illinois. Eventually he would move many of his legislative efforts in this direction, as he did with the Sangamo Insurance Company. Cullom saw good transportation on land, water, and railroads as vital to agriculture and, also, vital to the state. The more mechanized industries were still not well developed in the Illinois of the 1850's. As a result, Cullom tended to think of industry as dependent upon agriculture for its livelihood. He did not see the approaching day when industry would place its omnipotent pressure on government and society. The Civil War would point the way to that transition of economic power in the States. The agrarian South would lose to the industrial North in the epic struggle of the early 1860's. Soon after the War, agriculture would be on the decline economically, socially, and politically in Illinois.

By 1857, Cullom, previously a Free Soiler, could see a changing mood in the Republican Party. Problems in Kansas and the Dred Scott decision led Whigs and Free-Soilers alike to abandon their parties and join the ranks of the Republican Party. A few years earlier the Republicans were composed of society's

12 Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p.6.

"lunatic fringe," but now it was the only party taking a firm stand against slavery in the territories. Finally in 1858, following the political wisdom of Abraham Lincoln, Cullom became a member of the Republican Party.¹³ This was a move he would never regret. For one thing the Illinois farm vote would support the Republican Party after the Civil War. Secondly, the ideals of the Republican Party would grow and solidify in Cullom until the name Shelby Cullom and the Republican Party were almost synonymous. Cullom supported party policy almost to the letter, publicly. But privately he favored the agrarian wing in contrast to the business wing. In the early days of Cullom's career, the business wing was not powerful in Illinois, and he hoped industry would serve the agrarian's interest. Later he would see the error of his ways.

The election of 1858 was a dramatic affair in Illinois. The rail splitting Lincoln was campaigning vigorously against the Little Giant Stephen Douglas for Douglas' seat in the United States Senate. It was the year of the Lincoln-Douglas debates and national attention was focused on these two great men. Lincoln made his appeal to the northern part of Illinois and the wealthier agrarians. Douglas carried the southern part of the state with its poorer pro-slavery people. In the end, Lincoln would win the popular vote, but Douglas would win the legislature's and be returned to his seat in the Senate.

¹³ Cullom, p. 28.

Disappointed over Lincoln's defeat, Cullom told Lincoln of his unhappiness, but Lincoln merely placed a hand on Cullom's shoulder and said: "Never mind, my boy; it will all come right." ¹⁴ Cullom would later remark about Lincoln's political perceptiveness. In Lincoln, Cullom saw the ideal he probably wanted to attain. A man who knew the law and how to use it as well as almost any man in the nation. An astute politician who was capable of the shrewdest and most imaginative political schemes known. To a degree, Cullom would try to imitate these qualities in his own political career. The difference though was that Lincoln was imaginative and articulate, while Cullom was pedestrian and less systematized in his thinking than Lincoln.

In 1860 the Democratic Party was split between the Northern and Southern factions. The tree of secession had blossomed in the South. Lincoln, Douglas, Breckinridge, and Bell were running for President of the United States, and Lincoln was labelled an abolitionist by the Southerners. A final break between the North and South was inevitable when Lincoln was elected President. The Civil War would make Illinois national importance abundantly clear, as the need for food throughout the war placed great burdens on the farmer. The massive production of Illinois agriculture contributed greatly to the supply of food during that troubled time. Without this aid the war efforts of the Union Army may have failed. The success of Illinois agriculture added advantage to the Northern cause.

¹⁴ Cullom, p. 88.

At Springfield, Shelby Cullom was again elected to the Illinois House of Representatives in 1860.¹⁵ The Republicans won an overwhelming victory in the Illinois House. They needed a speaker and Cullom's name was almost immediately mentioned. From the beginning his reputation for competence in law and government and his congenial personality made him an ideal choice for speaker. Along with this, Cullom was honest, loyal, strong in conviction, willing to listen to both sides of a question, and had an agrarian background. In Cullom the Republicans believed they found a man who would lead them honorably, competently, and with very little friction. It was important to have a man familiar with the problems of the prairie, since agriculture was the most powerful force in Illinois at this time. Vital Jarrot, a representative from St. Clair County, put Cullom's name in nomination, and Cullom defeated James Singleton of Adams County by a vote of 39 to 29. Recognizing some dissension among older party members, Cullom in his maiden speech as speaker said:

although one of the youngest members
of your body-although deficient in
that experience which an office so
important demands, I accept the
position of your presiding officer,
gratefully, and without anxiety,

¹⁵ Journal of the House of Representatives of the
Twenty-Second General Assembly of the State of Illinois,
p. 4.

trusting that the soundness of your judgement and the efficiency of your counsels may supply my lack of experience, and that your forbearance and courtesy may render less arduous my task of preserving order in your deliberations. 16

As speaker, Cullom tried to perform his duties impartially, and this helped him become a more effective leader. It was a ticklish situation for Cullom, because the Civil War was just beginning, and Southern Illinois showed some Confederate sympathy. Cullom had to project a confidence that would make him compatible with both Republicans and Democrats. He succeeded in this venture. He later said he made more friends on both sides of the aisle as Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives than at any other time in his political career.

Lincoln was still President-elect when Cullom remarked to him that he would not mind going to Washington himself. Lincoln's response was, "Mr. Speaker, come on." 17 Until then, Cullom never seriously considered public office in Washington; now, he began giving it much more attention. In examining the situation, Cullom realized a well executed gerrymander involving the Republican counties of McLean, Livingston, Logan, Dewitt and Tazewell could produce the kind of constituency that would

16 Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty Second General Assembly of the State of Illinois, pp. 6-7.

17 Cullom, p. 78.

send an agrarian Republican like himself to the United States Congress. ¹⁸

The district was a very productive farming area, and Cullom's agrarian sentiments should have been quite pleasing to the people in those counties. Under his directions as Speaker the district was created, but his personal ambitions were offset for 1862. The Republican Party felt obliged to run Leonard Swett, a more prominent Republican. Swett was an older man and had a reputation for working hard for the party. He told this to Cullom who then willingly gave his support to Swett. ¹⁹ This was in itself important, because it showed Cullom's self-effacing personality. Party leaders knew it was not an easy act for a young man of ambition to perform. But it was the kind of thing that would make Cullom popular in party circles at later dates. Even more it was a political favor, and political favors are remembered by politicians. Cullom's ambitions for 1862 were hurt even more when he was defeated in a race for the Illinois State Senate. Meanwhile his old law teacher John Stuart defeated Swett in the Congressional District Cullom had designed for a Republican victory. Cullom now gave his entire attention to the practice of law in Springfield. He formed a law partnership with Milton

¹⁸ Harry E. Pratt, "Repudiation of Lincoln's War Policy in 1862 - Stuart-Swett Congressional Campaign," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, XXIV, 130 (April, 1931).

¹⁹ Cullom, p. 79.

Hay, son-in-law of Judge Stephen Logan, Lincoln's former law partner. This law firm became very successful and enjoyed one of the largest law practices in the state. It was a time for Cullom to get away from the hectic world of politics. It gave him an opportunity to reflect and reach new conclusions about the role of government in relation to the farmer. The emergence of new industrial forces in Illinois made Cullom search for other ways to protect the agrarians' interests. Chicago was the center of this transition in Illinois as railroads, steel mills, and stockyards led this new set of conditions. In the meantime agriculture suffered from more middlemen, higher operational expenses, and increased competition. These problems angered the farming community. Slowly Cullom would begin to formulate some ideas on conservative reform to meet this crisis on the Illinois prairie. He emphasized better transportation for goods to market and stable currency.

Financially it was the most prosperous period of Cullom's life. Had he remained in the law he may very well have earned wide reknown in the legal profession. He also remarried, at this time, as his first wife died. He married Julia Fischer on May 5, 1863. She was the sister of his first wife. ²⁰

As the year of 1864 arrived, Cullom's desire to get back in politics increased. He was still prominent in the local Republican Party, and now he seemed the logical choice to run

²⁰ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p. 9.

against his old law teacher, John Stuart. The campaign between Cullom and Stuart was hard fought. The local press called Stuart a "Copperhead," and a disciple of Congressman Clement L. Valladigham, from Ohio, who spoke out against the Civil War. Cullom personally used no harsh tactics against his old friend. It was an easy victory for Cullom, since the voting pattern was similar to what he had anticipated three years earlier. The only deviation from his original expectations was Tazewell County, the county of Cullom's boyhood and youth. It went Democratic.

In the 39th Congress, Cullom displayed a great deal of activity for an incoming freshman Congressman. His first act was to present a resolution "to inquire into the expediency of establishing a national military school in some of the states of the great Northwest." ²¹ This proposal showed his immediate concern for the West in Congress. The farmer was important to Cullom not only because this was his constituency, but he also saw the prairie's great potential to contribute to all America. Cullom believed the nation's wealth lay in her soil and how she used it. His agrarian attitude began to manifest itself as he made more efforts for Western interests.

Later in the 39th Congress he asked for an amendment to the revenue law to send tax notices through the mail to the people. Cullom said:

²¹ Congressional Globe, Thirty-Ninth Congress, First Session (Dec. 6, 1865), p. 15.

It is a matter of very little labor and expense, and it will certainly, in the rural districts of the country, enable a great many men to learn that they are called upon to pay their taxes at a particular time, when they would not, perhaps, know it otherwise. 22

This was one more way Cullom responded to the growing needs of the frontier. Communication was slow on the prairie and no one knew it better than someone who once lived there.

Reelected in 1866, Cullom resumed his duties as Congressman in the 40th Congress representing western agrarianism. His efforts again were geared considerably to satisfy the agricultural areas of the country. Indications of this soon appeared when he proposed an amendment to tax exempt "manufacturers of sugar from beets." 23 According to Cullom these people were unable to make any profit, and taxation would only drive them out of business. Likewise the growers of beets, namely farmers, would benefit from such an amendment. Taxation, too, presented itself to Cullom's agrarian actions when he said, "The burdens of taxation now resting upon the people are so heavy that they are calling upon us for relief." 24 This was a typical reaction of many nineteenth century farmers;

22 Congressional Globe, Thirty-Ninth Congress, First Session (May 26, 1866), p. 2578.

23 Ibid., Fortieth Congress, Second Session, (June 11, 1868), p. 3064.

24 Ibid., p. 4091.

it was their general attitude that taxes were always too high. The farmer believed he carried too much of society's tax burden.

By the time of the 41st Congress Cullom began to increase his agrarian activity even more. Now he was Chairman of the House Committee on Territories. His area of agrarian responsibility had grown. He became more concerned about Western territories such as Wyoming, Utah, and Montana. He presented a bill to Congress authorizing the judges of Wyoming Territory to define their own judicial districts; a bill to aid in the execution of laws in Utah; a bill to establish a post road in Illinois; and a bill for payment of military expenses in the territory of Montana.²⁵ The effect of his early environment was quite apparent. The moderate minded Cullom even began to sound like a radical agrarian Populist when he attacked the tariff by saying,

The greedy manufacturer who has grown rich under a high tariff and a great demand for his goods during the war must not be allowed to take possession of the legislation of this country at the expense of the struggling millions who are never seen lobbying about these Halls.²⁶

No great friend of big business, his agrarian point of

²⁵ Congressional Globe, Forty-first Congress, Second Session, Index.

²⁶ Ibid., (April 26, 1870), p. 3004.

view would always look at the world of trusts, mergers, and cartels with a sense of fear, suspicion, and awe. Actually, Cullom desired some kind of balance between industry and agriculture. Bad tactics by business toward agriculture, however, made him suspicious of business. Railroads, middlemen, and high tariffs were hurting the farmer. Cullom recognized the need for an honest relationship between the businessman and the agrarian. He knew it would be difficult to coordinate such a relationship without governmental assistance. He tried to render this aid in Congress. He realized a strong interdependence was necessary for the good of Illinois and the country. Therefore many of his proposals would be only moderate in form so he could conciliate both parties. Cullom realized agriculture certainly could not improve if industry failed to produce the plows, reapers, wagons, and various other items that made the farmer's work simpler and more efficient. On the other hand society as a whole was dependent upon the farmer. The growth in population leaned heavily on the food production of agriculture.

By 1870, Cullom was challenged by strong opposition for his seat in Congress. The campaign promised to be difficult for Cullom, and he did not respond to his opposition very quickly. It was not so much that his constituents were unhappy with the way he performed his duties in Congress, but a general attitude existed in Illinois's 8th district that three terms were long enough for one man to sit in office. The people simply wanted change in representation. Traditionally this was not unusual. Agrarian America always desired this

Jeffersonian behavior by the voter. A Jeffersonian maxim was, "A leader may offer, but not impose himself." ²⁷ This was true in Jeffersonian Democracy and Illinois agrarianism. It was one more way the people could protect their representation in government. Cullom did try for the nomination, but his timing was slow. He lost to Colonel John Merriam of Tazewell County.

Shelby Cullom came home to Sangamon County with the thought that he could go in one of three directions; law, business, or politics. Cullom was at a crossroads. Before long he would try all three. Soon he formed a law partnership with Charles S. Zane and G. O. Marcy, but a career as an attorney was not enough. ²⁸ Wanting more he tried various business ventures. The concept of corporate wealth attracted and frightened him at the same time. For a person raised on the farm and taught its virtues of hard work, frugality, and honesty, this world of new ideas, high finance, and massive industrial controls over markets was quite strange. His business ventures on the whole were modest, and his business sense was basically sound. He took no chances and made no changes except under the most careful consideration. In time he became nominal head of the State National Bank in Springfield. His agrarian tendencies guarded him from taking chances. Cullom

²⁷ Gilbert Chinard, Thomas Jefferson, The Apostle of Americanism (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1964), p. 128.

²⁸ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p. 23.

was empirical in his thinking, and imaginative business schemes escaped him.

Cullom desired, however, to return to government. His chances for political office improved when rumors began to spread that Springfield was going to lose the state capital. Many unhappy citizens turned to Cullom to take the people's case to the state government. The people of Sangamon County wanted Cullom in the state legislature again. At first Cullom was hesitant, because on the surface it appeared a stepdown from his previous position as a United States Congressman. He realized in another sense, however, it was a different situation altogether. It could mean the beginning of a whole new political career with higher office close at hand. In addition, Cullom was not seeking the office, the office was seeking him, and this made his candidacy more acceptable. Finally, in 1872, the party nominated him for state legislator from Sangamon County. Cullom's eyes, however, were not on the statehouse; now they were on the Governor's Mansion. Once in the legislature, Cullom's selection as speaker was almost inevitable. The Republicans held a huge majority in the legislature, and there was little question who they would select to lead them.

Chosen Speaker of the House in January of 1873, Cullom was back in the same spot he occupied twelve years earlier, but, in another way, he was in a much higher position than previously. Illinois had grown tremendously in population.

Overall, agriculturally, she was second in the nation, and the functions of the state legislature were greatly expanded by the new constitution of 1870. The Gilded Age was dawning, and the excitement of a new era in America was making Cullom apprehensive about the future of the Illinois farmer.

Railroads, new industries, and ostentatious displays of wealth were drawing attention away from the ordinary dirt farmer. The provocative Gilded Age had arrived with all its atrocities, audacity, and injustices. As Speaker, Cullom recognized these new conditions of power, but to him they were not backed with the substance of the agrarian world. To Cullom there was something missing in the lavishness of this new era. Possibly he was most offended by the superficiality of wealth, materialism, and shallow friendships. Its tendency to be mass rather than individually oriented bothered Cullom. On the prairie he had learned to respect the individual person, but this new world only showed contempt and indifference toward people. It was a changing world, and Shelby Cullom failed to make the complete transition. Gradually it would pass him by, especially near the end of his political career.

Meanwhile in the state legislature of 1873, Cullom saw the establishment of the first board on the regulation of railroads and warehouses in Illinois. It was a badly needed piece of legislation and due partially to the pressure placed upon the state legislature by the Patrons of Husbandry movement in Illinois. Cullom exercised little authority over

this particular piece of legislation, but in the coming years commerce controls would be his greatest concern in government. This act was unprecedented in the United States; later it will be discussed in greater detail. ²⁹

Again, in 1874, Cullom was campaigning for office in the state legislature. At this time he praised the tariff publicly to appease the party, called for passage of a civil rights bill, and said the Republican Party was the party of human rights. All of this was necessary for a pragmatic politician like Cullom. He won reelection with Sangamon County giving him more votes than any other candidate. As usual Cullom was the party choice for speaker, but this time the legislature was more closely divided. The Independents held the balance of power, and they were in no mood to support a Republican Speaker. They blamed the Republicans for the financial distress of 1873 and gave their support to the Democratic candidate Elijah Haines of Lake County. Cullom lost his bid for the Speakership to Haines by a vote of 81 to 68.

It was now 1875 and Cullom was no longer harnessed with the responsibilities of presiding officer; he could play an active role in the pursuit of legislation. His agrarianism was now more subtle. He proposed a bill requiring banking associations to make

²⁹ Journal of the House of Representatives of Twenty-Eighth General Assembly of the State of Illinois, p. 54.

quarterly reports to the state. This indicated his desire to keep a close watch on finances in Illinois.³⁰ He also proposed a bill permitting the council of any city in the State to levy an annual tax not exceeding two mills (two tenths of one cent) on all taxable property.³¹ In the meantime he began to wonder whether banks were in part responsible for the financial distress then existing in the nation; this thinking may have prompted his proposed banking measure.

³⁰ Journal of the House of Representatives of the Twenty-Ninth General Assembly of the State of Illinois, p. 111.

³¹ Ibid., p. 107.

CHAPTER II

THE ELECTION OF 1876

THROUGH

THE RAILROAD STRIKE OF 1877

Chapter II is the first of two chapters on Cullom's governorship. This chapter is fairly short in relation to its span of time. The section goes from the Spring of 1876 to August 1877. The chapter is divided into three parts. Part one involves Cullom's first election for governor and the campaign tactics he used to win downstate votes. The second segment concerns Cullom's inaugural address and the many different proposals he made in relation to the agrarian community. The final part of this chapter involves the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. This strike showed an interesting facet of Cullom's agrarian attitudes. It pointed to his concern for property rights and order. These attitudes evolved from the early prairie where both were fundamental to the state's structure socially, economically, and politically.

For several years Cullom had been preparing for his big step in politics, the governorship of Illinois. It was now 1876, and the powerful Republican Richard Oglesby was conveniently tucked away in the United States Senate. At home, on the Illinois prairie Governor John Beveridge could hardly be considered a pillar of political power. The time was right. In the spring of 1876 Cullom began his bid for the Republican Party nomination for governor.

The race appeared a wide open contest. Not only Cullom and Beveridge, but State Treasurer Thomas S. Ridgway and United States Minister to France Elihu Washburne were also entered

in the race. ³² To political observers Cullom seemed the strongest candidate among the state officials, but the status of Washburne's candidacy was difficult to determine. Washburne was highly respected in top Republican circles, but he was not well known to the voters of Illinois. Being a close friend of President Grant's indicated Washburne should try to gain support through the leaders of the Republican Party. This contrasted with the agrarian Cullom who knew his power base was with the people of the Illinois prairie. Cullom decided he should try to recruit delegates by seeking their nominations at county conventions of the Republican Party. In doing this Cullom hoped to win the party's nomination at Springfield.

Cullom's first convention was Sangamon County. The delegates met there on April 25th. All kinds of rumors spread through Springfield. One popular statement printed in Springfield's Register said, Cullom would take part in a liberal movement lead by Senator Carl Schurz of Missouri, Journalist Horace White of the Chicago Tribune, and others. This assertion was based on the fact that prominent local progressives like W. J. Conkling, Dr. William Jayne and J. K. Dubois were aiding Cullom forces. ³³ The accusation was untrue, but anti-Cullom people were out to stop him politically. In reality Cullom would be only somewhat appealing to liberal

³² Springfield, Illinois State Register, April 26, 1876.

³³ Ibid.

Republicans. His agrarian desire to perpetuate moderation and evolutionary rather than revolutionary government gave the impression to many people he was a fence straddler. Cullom's unwillingness to seek quick simple solutions was a characteristic of those agrarians who understood just how very hard life actually was on the frontier. Cullom's desire in government was always that of a conservative reformer. He desired good constructive change just like the Illinois farmer, but he was afraid of any new ideas that would do more harm than good.

At the Sangamon County Convention the fear mongers were unable to deter the delegates. Cullom was endorsed by the convention delegates. An interesting sidelight to the convention was that a committee of three were chosen to inform Cullom of the results and bring him back to speak, since he was not in attendance at the meeting. In somewhat self effacing manner, they found him at the State National Bank clipping coupons. 34

The convention's endorsement of Cullom evidently frightened Washburne, because two days later he withdrew from the race. Why Washburne entered in the first place is difficult to answer. Some speculation believed he was actually grooming for the Presidency. They believed Washburne never

34 Springfield, Illinois State Register, April 25, 1876.

had any real ambitions for governor. As for Cullom, it made his primary plans much easier.

The party nomination was now a rather forgone conclusion to professional observers. It was generally acknowledged before the balloting Cullom had a plurality if not a majority of the delegates. On the party platform the most crucial issue was hard currency and resumption of specie payments. With an economic depression on at that time Cullom deviated from the radical agrarians on this issue. He did, however, receive the support of those more moderate minded farmers who were the bulk of Illinois agrarians. Cullom's conservative agrarian thinking on financial issues considered that only through sound money could the economy return to prosperity in Illinois and America.

Actually more spending was probably needed by government to get the economy moving, but there was still a mystique in society about the law of supply and demand. Most agrarians believed, like Cullom, in balanced budgets and limited governmental spending. These were natural laws in classical economics, and one must not tamper with them. The general line of reasoning was that when times were bad invariably they got better and vice versa. It was just like the sun rising in the east and setting in the west, nothing could be done about this inevitable cycle. The Illinois farmer saw little possibility in controlling these vicious trends of inflation and deflation of currency. Even Cullom with some of the

qualities of a reformer accepted this inevitable cycle for the most part. Sometimes he would wonder whether big business was not in part responsible, but his limited knowledge of economics restricted any real understanding of the problem.

On May 24th, the state's Republican Convention was held in Springfield. Judge H. S. Baker of Alton was chosen chairman of the convention. Cullom's name was placed in nomination by James C. Conkling of Sangamon County. It was an easy first ballot victory for Cullom. He led Beveridge and Ridgeway 387 to 142 and 87. With this victory all the delegates rushed to change their votes for Cullom and party unity. His two opponents' names were withdrawn, and Cullom won by acclamation. ³⁵

In addressing the convention after receiving the nomination, Cullom made an appeal for a united party. He did this by recalling the atrocities of the Civil War and waving the bloody shirt. These tactics always created a certain bondship among Republicans, since they were the party in power during the war. Cullom was evidently concerned about the coming elections for governor in November. He was trying to scare the party into unity by suggesting attempts were being made to reinstate the principles of the Confederacy, namely the sovereign rights of states. All of this was nonsense, but in the turbulence of an election year it often worked. On

³⁵ Chicago Tribune, May 25, 1876.

the Illinois prairie communication was slow, and it was difficult to get good information. So Cullom tried to bluff the Illinois agrarian into believing everything they fought for eleven years earlier could be lost with the election of a Democrat.

Cullom also called attention to the civil rights question. He insisted no more legislation was necessary for the protection of citizens. Actually Cullom was recognizing the fact that the Illinois farmer was tired of listening to the problems of individual liberties. Even Cullom probably desired a period of calm and moderation after the scandals of the Grant Administration and the animosity created between the North and South after the Civil War. Like the Illinois farmer, Cullom wished to get Illinois back to a state of normalcy. 36

The campaign of 1876 showed Cullom in what appeared a mood of desparation. Recognizing descent throughout the country for Republicans after eight years of Grant made the moderate minded Cullom panic politically. The usually mild mannered Cullom spoke out harshly at his political opponents. He was unwilling to rely heavily upon friends for help in campaigning. He did not possess the usual Cullom trust in people. He wanted the governorship badly so he fought hard to win it.

He opened his campaign with a fourth of July speech at

36 Chicago Tribune, May 25, 1876.

This was Cullom the political realist. He knew the civil rights issue was no longer popular, so he was subtly dropping it. Cullom was changing from an idealist in politics to a pragmatist in public office.

Geneseo in Henry County. In typical agrarian manner, he appealed to their Jeffersonian instincts when he said :

Our system is a perpetual plea of right against power -- the right as belonging to the people against the unjust exercise of power by those of authority. 37

The Illinois farmer wanted a society where smallness and equal property rights insured protection of individual liberties and a spirit of justice. He did not want public policy dictated to him. He desired representative democracy, and Cullom advocated that form of government. Both feared the dictates of powerful interests like big business to the American institution of democracy. Cullom also spoke of education, the progress in getting more railroads in Illinois, and of course he had to mention the Revolutionary War on the fourth of July. In closing his address he eulogized Washington and Lincoln as he made an appeal to America's great patriots. It was all quite fitting and moving for Illinois agrarians on the one hundredth birthday of the United States. 38

Cullom had many problems as a candidate that year. Rutherford Hayes was the Republican nominee for President of the United States, and he was not popular in Illinois. Samuel Tilden the Democratic Presidential candidate was well accepted by many Illinoisans. To make matters worse, Cullom's own

37 Springfield, Illinois State Journal, July 7, 1876.

38 Ibid.

political record was not very impressive to Illinois voters. His opponent Lewis Steward, "the democratic apology for a Governor," ³⁹ was a paradoxical candidate. In ways, he was ideal for capturing the Illinois farm vote. His feet were deeper in the Illinois soil than Cullom's, but unlike Cullom he was extremely wealthy as a result of farming. His financial holdings consisted of many farms, huge land holdings, and a fortune made in the manufacturing and selling of reapers. The Republicans tried to make him out as more a businessman than farmer to secure the vital agrarian vote.

Steward was a controversial figure whose private life was pretty well exposed to public scrutiny by some angry in-laws. One of these rumors said he was cruel to his wife. Much of this was probably encouraged by the Republican Party. Cullom appears innocent, at least directly, of such vulgar defamations of a man's personal life. For a while Steward seemed a political joke, but there was a certain integrity to this old man's character one had to respect. He refused the money party leaders tried to impose upon him for campaign expenses, and he was unwilling to make any political promises. This, no doubt, hurt him among party professionals and kept campaign enthusiasm among Democrats down.

Both candidates seemed to be having a hard time on the Illinois prairie, but the Democrats were delighted over a

³⁹ Springfield, Illinois State Journal, October 20, 1876.

Republican scandal. The democratic press were overjoyed by the prospects of such an incident during an election year. The Democrats claimed Bluford Wilson of Springfield, former United States district attorney and solicitor for the Treasury Department, was sitting on secret information. It was knowledge that was supposed to bring almost certain defeat to the Republicans in November. 40

For Cullom it was a difficult situation. The scandal, covering a whiskey ring in Pekin was said to involve him. At first Cullom chose to ignore these accusations. Such behavior was typical of nineteenth century politics. Finally in response to rumors, even party members were questioning Cullom's honesty, he consented to a hearing before Republican Party officials. At the meeting Cullom shocked even his closest associates. Cullom who was generally congenial, amiable, and diplomatic displayed a majestic anger over the party's questioning. In his autobiography Cullom failed to mention these events. The incident evidently penetrated deeply into the Cullom spirit. Integrity was a very basic component of this agrarian oriented man.

In spite of his problems, Cullom's campaign rolled on into southern Illinois in early August. There he spoke at Carbondale and Murphysboro. Then he moved northward into Olney, Salem,

40 William Searles, "Governor Cullom and the Pekin Whiskey Ring Scandal," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, LI (Spring, 1958), p. 28.

Pana, Decatur, Bement, and Quincy. By the beginning of September Cullom was at Galesburg in Northern Illinois. He seemed to be speaking only to prairie communities, realizing the heart of Illinois agrarianism lay in these small rural hamlets around the state. Quite consciously Cullom was putting himself before the people of Illinois he knew and understood best. It was logical for him to do this, since they were the basis of his constituency. Cullom's chances, however, seemed in a state of fluctuation. Evidently feeling the pressure of campaigning, he went into towns like Bloomington and Vandalia addressing the people in a haranging manner. This was not like Cullom, but his back was to the wall. Cullom generally tried a more honest approach with people, but such sincerity was a luxury he could not be particularly concerned about at that time.

In early October he was back in northern Illinois where he made an appeal to the state's wealthier agrarians. These people were probably some of Cullom's strongest backers. They were more moderate minded than the counties further south where agrarian prosperity was less. For this reason Cullom waited until near the end of the campaign to speak in this area. He was hoping for a strong finish. In the last week Cullom's campaign was especially intense. He scheduled a speech a day from October 31st to November 4th which was a lot of campaigning in 1876.

The election was very close. The final tally gave Cullom

279,263 votes and Steward 272,465.⁴¹ Cullom won the state by about 6800 votes, but the usually Republican Cook County went Democratic by 181 votes. Chicago had little interest in Cullom's agrarian background. Cullom was happy with his election victory. His agrarian appeals worked well, and made him more aware of his great political strength on the Illinois prairie. Cullom considered the Governorship of Illinois in many ways equal to the office of President of the United States and Chief Justice of the United States. He believed this because of Illinois' great wealth agriculturally and industrially and the impact it had on the rest of the nation.

At about 1:30 P.M. on January 8, 1877 the Illinois General Assembly was called to order by F. K. Granger of McHenry. Approximately two-thirds of the members were present. With everyone sitting tensely anticipating a historic moment, the justices of the state supreme court entered the room followed by the state senators who came in as a body. The galleries were packed with people when at two o'clock Governor-elect Cullom entered with Governor Beveridge, Senator John Logan, Lieutenant Governor-elect Andrew Shuman and other members of the official party. The judges of the Supreme Court mounted the rostrum and the oath of office was administered to Cullom.⁴²

Governor Cullom's inaugural address was rather short when

⁴¹ John Moses, Illinois Historical and Statistical (Chicago, 1895), p. 839.

⁴² Chicago Tribune, January 9, 1877.

compared with those of earlier governors. He stated his delight over the new state house, but he was probably happy his administration had not spent the money to build it. He called Illinois, "preeminently an agricultural state,"⁴³ and voiced optimism in its potential for growth. He regarded the state

as a great business enterprise
whose objects are the preservation
of order, the enforcement of law,
the punishment of lawbreakers,
the care of the poor and unfortunate,
and the education of the young.⁴⁴

Cullom showed his agrarian attitudes by calling for the improvement of the Illinois River. He saw great potential in its shipment of grain and produce to market. On the Railroad and Warehouse Commission he made some poignant remarks. In its inception Cullom said the commission was regarded as only experimental legislation. Its original purpose was to correct the abuses by railroads in establishing rates. As experimental legislation it had been limited, but Cullom now favored giving the law more substance. Realizing the farmer's dilemma he believed there was still much that could be done in relation to rate reduction. The Illinois agrarian was still suffering too much at the hands of railroads.

⁴³ "Cullom's Inaugural Address," Journal of the Illinois House of Representatives, January 8, 1877, p. 54.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

Unlike the more radical agrarians in his address he did not favor state ownership of the roads. This was too extreme for the moderate minded Cullom who believed free enterprise was basic to a free society, but Cullom thought corporations built by the state had a responsibility to the people. Continuing on, he regarded the success of railroads as only possible through the willingness of their managers not to retard the efforts of the laborer and producer. Cullom recognized the greatness of railroads to Illinois. He was pleased with the vast economic development throughout the state due to railroads. He wanted this to continue, and so he based his proposal on the proposition that railroads had a social responsibility.

Again in his inaugural address Cullom's agrarian tendencies came through on that day. He asked the legislature to look into this matter and determine whether it might be necessary to build some new roads. His reason for making this request was because a good part of the year these roads were impassable. This was especially true, at that time of year, when the farmer transported his harvests to market.

Cullom probably envisioned a statesmanlike administration. He seemed to possess some of the air of a statesman. He was not a statesman in the 1870's, but he did project an image of gentility which gave this impression. He was not an extrovert like John Logan. He was a reticent man, and he always appeared to hold back and hide a part of himself. For

this reason he looked colorless, especially to those who did not know him well. In private, personal contact with people Cullom was extremely effective. This again was a manifestation of the prairie, he enjoyed relating to people individually on a private basis rather than publicly on a mass basis.

Cullom definitely wanted to be a governor of all the people. As always he tried to represent the interests of the state in a moderately progressive, but thrifty manner. Cullom was afraid of rapid change and extravagant expenditures. Both of these factors were dangerous to him, because they moved outside his agrarian realm of comprehension. He was not emotionally or intellectually prepared to handle the larger problems of society such as industrialism or urbanism.

About six months after he became governor Cullom was severely tested. In his inaugural address Cullom said:

I desire to add one suggestion to the affairs of our own State, by calling your attention to the Militia Law. I believe a more perfect law should be enacted, which will secure a more thorough organization of the State militia. 45

Little did he dream how timely a suggestion this would be, although it was not enacted in time to benefit Cullom's Administration , for the approaching dangers. As the panic of 1873 reached its peak, men wandered about the country jobless. Hard times had gripped the nation. Companies

45 "Cullom's Inaugural Address," Journal of the Illinois House of Representatives, January 8, 1877, p.57.

could make no profits, and men could make no money. In the railroad industry it was especially crucial. Railroad companies out of business across the nation numbered 83 and involved 12,814 miles of track. ⁴⁶

Cullom, as stated before, was not well versed in economics. He believed the inevitable cycle of deflation would eventually end, but he was not sure how it would happen. Unlike the more radical agrarians, he did not look for demons on Wall Street. His agrarianism taught him to use more scrutiny with such problems than is often the case with society's revolutionary elements. This often made him appear painfully slow, but Cullom knew well the cliché, haste makes waste. As a result he was hesitant to make any decision until he was sure it was the best decision.

Since 1875 the railroad companies had suffered heavy losses. Prices fell off. Freight shipments were reduced, and stocks lost their value. Companies could not pay dividends to stockholders, rents for hired roads, or interest on their bonds. At a time when prudence, judgement, and conservatism were needed in the management of railroads, troubles were compounded by reckless cut-throat competition between various lines. Most of these incidents involved railroad rates for the shipment of goods. In many cases the situation became so critical a train load of freight barely paid for wages and

⁴⁶ D. Phillip Locklin, Economics of Transportation (Homewood, Illinois, 1954), p. 583.

coal. Profits left little for wear and tear, repairs, and other expenses incurred by the railroads. The railroads not only fought with each other ruthlessly, but they also attempted to take business away from waterways. For two years, this undesirable activity had been going on across the nation. In the last six months it intensified even more. Competition was so bad businesses plunged into utter confusion.

The railroad companies had destroyed their profits. To save themselves from greater losses, these companies turned upon their employees. Already the employee's wages had been cut two or three times. This time the companies reduced wages to the line of starvation. Trackmen, switchmen, and laborer's wages were cut from one dollar a day to ninety cents a day. Brakemen and firemen had wages cut from one dollar and a half a day to one dollar and thirty-five cents a day.⁴⁷ The workers protested against the pay cuts saying it was physically impossible to live on such meager wages. As a result, they refused to starve and resisted this loss in income. This resistance which began in the eastern part of the United States and eventually spread into Illinois was known as the Great Railroad Strike of 1877.

The major trouble began on the Pennsylvania and the Baltimore and Ohio roads. The word of a strike in the East excited the nation and captured the attention of dissident railroad men throughout the country. The newspapers considering

⁴⁷ Chicago Tribune, July 23, 1877.

it their journalistic duty to keep society well informed gave strength to unhappy railroad men in states further West. By July 21st the violence in Baltimore was front page news in Illinois. The agrarian community deplored any form of violence. These people held that order and property rights were basic to the structure of the state. They could not understand the real problems of the laboring man. Aside from the fact that the Illinois farmer did not like the urban centers, he also showed a naivete about dealing fairly with corporations. He refused to acknowledge the necessity of unionism, and balancing human rights with property rights. Partially this was because such rights were not as much in jeopardy in rural Illinois as the larger cities. In essence corporations had too much power in the metropolitan areas of Illinois and they abused this power by exploiting the people who worked for them.

Finally in the last week of July the strike reached Illinois. Towns feeling its blows most strongly were Chicago, Springfield, Galesburg, East St. Louis, and Braidwood. Cullom said, "The State was ill prepared for such a crisis." ⁴⁸ The Illinois National Guard could not be depended upon for effective control, since it was poorly equipped and organized. Cullom was in a bad position. The influential leaders of Illinois painted the unhappy strikers as revolutionaries.

⁴⁸ Cullom, Fifty Years, p.162.

Like the Illinois farmer many of these people shared his attitudes about order and property rights. Even leading men of ideas like historian John Fiske considered these sacred laws.⁴⁹ To these people the strikers were nothing but anarchists. They were incapable of seeing the workers frustration with industry. Little sympathy was shown for the plights of the working class.

Newspapers were especially partial to blaming the violence on radicals and communists. The Chicago Tribune insisted the rioters there were, for the most part not laborers, but a small band of revolutionaries,⁵⁰ while at Mount Vernon it was reported railroad strikers went to the machine shops of the St. Louis and Southeastern Railroad, and according to a newspaper report caused a commotion. The newspaper further sustained the agrarian viewpoint by saying:

These shops gave employment to some eighty men, nearly all of whom have families, sit under their own wine and fig trees and, it is said have never been heard to express dissatisfaction with wages they received though this is denied by men of the strike.⁵¹

The obvious implication was that most of the workers were content with their wages. This agrarian attitude of a need for

⁴⁹ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p.46.

⁵⁰ Chicago Tribune, July 28, 1877.

⁵¹ Chicago Tribune, July 26, 1877.

law and order was used by influential leaders of Illinois business community to convince the people that there was no reason for disenchantment. Why the Illinois farmers supported the vested interests of business seems fairly obvious. These people had known the hardships of an earlier Illinois prairie where disorder created difficulty. They fought hard to give Illinois a system of laws and now this structure was breaking down, and they feared a return to the old disharmony. For different reasons the Illinois agrarians and businessmen desired suppression of the striking railroad men.

Back at Springfield Cullom was trying to put an end to violence in Chicago, East St. Louis, and Braidwood. At first Cullom tried to reason with the rioters, but he soon learned the situation demanded more if order was to be restored. Realizing his National Guard was weak, Cullom issued a proclamation calling for the people of Illinois to obey the laws. Showing his agrarian instinct for order, he instructed mayors, sheriffs, and other city officials to meet this problem by repressing the first instances of rioting. D. W. Lusk in Politics of Illinois points out Cullom's adherence to the theory that a government must maintain order. In regard to Cullom he said, "wherever mob law raised its hydra-head, he was quick to put it down." 52 To Cullom

⁵² D. W. Lusk, Politics and Politicians (Springfield, Illinois, 1886), p.320.

these rioters represented a threat to the stability of Illinois.

In typical agrarian manner, Cullom pleaded for moderation. He reminded the people of their right to assemble and indulge in dialogue, but he explained the proper place for a change in unjust legislation lay in the ballot box. Before long, however, it was necessary for Governor Cullom to petition President Hayes for troops to quell riots and blocking of trains throughout the state. Companies E and F of the Twenty-second Infantry arrived from the Indian Wars in territories further West. These well trained prairie hardened soldiers quickly quelled any desire for more violence in Chicago.

Finally Cullom, himself, got involved directly. Evidently feeling some of his prairie rugged individualism, and possibly showing off politically to his agrarian constituency, Cullom boarded a train and went to East St. Louis. There he was greeted by several thousand mild mannered laboring men sitting quietly on sidewalk curbs. Cullom concluded after some discussion with the strike leaders that they should fire up the train and return to Springfield. But about the time the train was ready to leave five or six hundred strikers blocked the train and put out the fire in the engine. Finding the men unwilling to concede to his demands, Governor Cullom called in troops and stationed them at strategic points around the city. This act insured the safety of the trains and the tranquility of East St. Louis. By August 1st the state

began to cool down, and Cullom was able to begin withdrawing troops.

Cullom's handling of the strike was generally approved of in Illinois. Few Illinois agrarians could do little more than applaud Cullom's methods in what many considered an insurrection. Cullom's own attitudes about the strike were similar to many agrarians when he said:

The vagrant, the wilfully idle,
was the chief element in all these
disturbances and we have to
recognize the fact that we have
among us a class which is ready,
at all times, to join in any
movement looking to a disturbance
of the peace and an opportunity
to plunder. 53

In reality Cullom failed to grasp the agonizing conditions that lead to such action. He did not understand the problems of labor. For the agrarian Cullom this was a strange set of conditions. On the prairie he understood a more individual oriented society. He was unable to see the frustration and anger of many men in the cities who were taken for granted and treated unfairly by employers. In rural Illinois if a man believed he was treated badly he could usually bargain with his employer. In industry a man who protested against unjust treatment was often fired. Cullom failed to see these distinctions between urban and

53 "Cullom's Biennial Message," Journal of the Illinois Senate, January 10, 1879, p.18.

rural life. The only thing Cullom could do was suppress the disorder. This was all he really understood about the trauma of 1877.

One good thing resulting from the riots was the establishment of the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1879. Not until his inaugural address of January 10, 1881 did Cullom discuss its purpose publicly. Here he said,

the Bureau of Labor Statistics was to collect and furnish to the General Assembly statistical details relating to all departments of labor, especially in its relation to the commercial, industrial, social, educational, and sanitary conditions of the laboring classes. 54

Realizing something was wrong the agrarian Cullom had made a step in the right direction toward understanding the problems of labor.

54 Cullom's Inaugural Address," Journal of the Illinois Senate, January 10, 1881, p.34.

CHAPTER III

THE GOVERNORSHIP 1878 - 1883

In Chapter III, Cullom's governorship is traced from 1878 until the time he stepped down in 1883 for a seat in the United States Senate. The material which was selected relates in various ways to his agrarian attitudes. Cullom's concern for the interests of rural Illinois are shown in many ways in this chapter. His continual campaigning in downstate areas at election time and his many proposals to the General Assembly in the interests of Illinois agrarians are mentioned quite frequently here. This section has a great variety of issues relating to Cullom's thinking, and it gives his agrarianism a broader perspective. Examples are his views on social legislation, an army appropriations bill that would endanger the voting rights of Negroes, and Cullom's concern about maximum rates of interest around the state.

After the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, Cullom's administration was fairly quiet until the election of 1878. Cullom was not happy with his legislature. It was split three ways between Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, with the Independents holding the balance of power. For this reason Cullom went about the task of trying to restore the Republican's power in the General Assembly in an off year election. As usual Cullom crossed the Illinois prairie, speaking at Cairo, Carbondale, Metropolis, Golconda, and Fairfield before he made a final swing through central Illinois. This time Cullom's efforts were more successful for the Republican Party. The final tally gave Cullom a Republican General Assembly.

The next major event was the selection of a United States Senator in January of 1879. Cullom again showed his effectiveness as a prairie politician. The contest quickly turned into a race between Senator Richard Oglesby and ex-Senator John Logan. With Cullom's backing, Logan's nomination was almost a certainty. Logan was a powerful man in Illinois politics. He was extremely popular with the boys in blue since he had been a General during the Civil War, and he was the son of a former law partner of Lincoln's. This probably pleased politicians from rural Illinois where Lincoln was revered. Logan like Cullom and Lincoln captured the heart of the Illinois prairie. On January 17, a caucus of Republicans nominated him 80 to 26 over Oglesby.⁵⁵ The Democratic candidate was John C. Black, a former Liberal Party nominee for Lieutenant Governor in 1872. The vote was not very close. Logan received 106 votes, Black 84, and 14 were divided among several other candidates.⁵⁶

In January of 1879, Cullom also delivered his biennial message to the State's Thirty-First General Assembly. Speaking to Representatives of the House and Senate, he expressed optimism that Illinois would begin moving into a new era of prosperity. He said of the agricultural industry, "The

⁵⁵ Springfield, Illinois State Journal, January 18, 1879.

⁵⁶ Ernest Ludlow Bogart and Charles Manfred Thompson, The Industrial State 1870-1893 (Springfield, Ill., 1920), p. 129.

harvests have been bountiful, especially for the year just closed." 57 Continuing on he again asserted, "Illinois is pre-eminently an agricultural State." 58 He called for legislation for protection of sheep and prevention of disease among farm animals. He complimented the Illinois Department of Agriculture for its useful statistics on agricultural production in the state. Cullom asked for an improvement of roads. He feared the cost to the interests of agriculture when the roads were in poor condition. Cullom was well aware that agriculture was vital to the state's economy. He believed for the Illinois people to again feel the winds of wealth, it was necessary for the state to maintain a viable agrarian economy.

On the Railroad and Warehouse Commission he said there was "a substantial increase in the tonnage and earnings in 1878 over the amount in 1877." 59 This coincides with the bountiful harvests Cullom spoke of earlier in the address. Cullom saw Illinois coming out of an economic depression, and he began to attribute much of this to the resourcefulness of the Illinois prairie. This becomes even more apparent when near the end of his message, Cullom remarks that the Illinois-

57 "Cullom's Biennial Message." Journal of the Illinois Senate, January 10, 1879, p.16.

58 Ibid., p.23.

59 Ibid., p.24.

Michigan Canal was vital to the interests of Illinois. Cullom believed this canal was important, because of the great trade it stimulated involving "the bulky products of our soil" ⁶⁰ with foreign countries.

In February of 1879, Cullom was back before the General Assembly defending the Railroad and Warehouse Commission. Cullom feared an unfavorable reaction to the Commission. He warned the Assembly that to eliminate this board would create difficulties and controversies throughout the state. Realizing the danger to the state if the commission were destroyed, Cullom actively sought support for more stringent controls over railroads. This was unusual in view of the fact that Cullom seldom pushed legislation through the legislature. Evidently feeling the vitalness of this issue from his own agrarian instincts, Cullom could not sit back and allow this bill debated into defeat. It was too important to the state's agrarian interests, and so Cullom concluded, it was too important to the state in general. Cullom was always sensitive to the need for order whether it involved striking railroad workers or control of rates by railroads.

Another area where Cullom was concerned about the interests of Illinois in 1879 dealt with rates of interest. He wished to establish a maximum interest on money loaned within the state. Cullom felt the older communities, where

⁶⁰ "Cullom's Biennial Message," Journal of the Illinois Senate, January 10, 1879, p.30.

capital was more abundant, could establish their own rates according to the law of supply and demand. In newer areas and agricultural communities where the supply of capital was not as great, experience proved the necessity of fixing a maximum rate of interest. Cullom knew the instability of grain markets and desired to give the less developed areas of Illinois more prosperity through order.

Cullom was aware of the farmer's burdens with railroads, taxes, and middlemen and the instability they created on the prairie. Cullom wanted the agrarian community to receive its fair share of the wealth. He was angry when he heard about how middlemen practically stole farmer's crops at the market. One popular story in the 1870's told of a farmer selling a load of grain at market. He returned home with a pair of boy's shoes. This was all he could purchase after selling his crop to a middleman. This sort of abuse of the state's agrarian community appalled Cullom, because he knew contented farmers were vital to the welfare of the state.

In May of 1879, a bill in Congress attracted Cullom's attention. He was pleased when President Hayes vetoed part of an Army appropriations bill that would have endangered the voting privileges of Negroes. Cullom saw this as a threat to a strong central government and the South's desire to reassert the states rights doctrine. In a letter to Hayes, Cullom praised him for stopping such legislation. Again Cullom's agrarian attitude shows his concern for order. Cullom

was frightened at the possibility of disharmony and disunion over such a law. Once more, Cullom was afraid of the disorder resulting from feuding factions over civil rights. This was still a divisive issue, and he knew from the early frontier how difficult it was to establish law and order.

On social legislation as governor, Cullom advocated only moderate programs. His rugged individualistic attitudes from the prairie maintained man should do most of his providing for himself. He did not believe it was the state's responsibility to provide cradle to the grave protection. To Cullom this was socialism, and he feared a large state budget.

Cullom lived in a century when the interpretations of government were not as socially conscious. His prairie attitudes of individual responsibility were the antithesis of any social responsibility. He did, however, approve an act to set up the state board of health on May 28, 1877. Four years later in May of 1881, he approved three bills regulating the practice of dentistry, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine. State boards for dentistry and pharmacy were established while state legislation for veterinarians was included in the third bill.⁶¹ Cullom's interpretation of social legislation dealt with basic needs. Almost intuitively Cullom seemed to realize the importance of fundamental issues. He learned this from the prairie where survival depended on a man recognizing those

⁶¹ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p51.

values most important to his survival. This is why Cullom's basic decisions in public office were generally very sound.

The truck bill of 1879 also showed Cullom's agrarian attitude. This was a controversial bill designed to stop the issuance of scrip rather than money in mining towns. Some supporters of the bill pointed out that often one dollar of scrip was worth only sixty cents of real money. The only place it could be used was at company stores, owned by the mine owners, where prices were always marked up. The need for such a bill seemed fairly obvious, yet one irate Senator said if such a bill became a law it could easily regulate the time an individual might eat. Under this cloud of contention the bill finally passed the Senate and came to rest on the shoulders of Governor Cullom.

Cullom pondered the matter, but none too deeply or clearly. Finally his agrarian thinking solved the problem for him. He interpreted the situation in terms of the master-servant relationship of his own youth. Here a person might be paid in either goods or money. Cullom thought he would jeopardize the laborer's individual freedom to bargain for wages by signing the bill. Cullom understood bargaining for wages on an individual basis. He failed to recognize the new realities of massive corporate structures and their indifference to labor. As a result, Cullom vetoed the bill. This probably drew a favorable reaction from the state's agrarians. The Chicago Tribune, however, was angry when it

printed Governor Cullom's veto message under the sarcastic caption "The laborer should not lose his right to get scooped." ⁶² Politically it was probably a wise move since Illinois was still an agrarian state in 1879, but it did hurt Cullom in urban areas like Chicago.

For all his agrarian attitudes, Cullom did not get along very well with the Grangers, who were the state's more militant farmers. These people organized into large pressure groups and hoped to coerce politicians into supporting Granger legislation. The Grangers held strongly to the idea that they were being exploited by railroads. To them railroads were the source of their problems. They did not recognize the problems of overproduction on the farm, an unstable economy that no one really understood, and rigid interest rates on a fluctuating cycle of inflation and deflation. To these people it was essentially a problem of good against bad. They believed a mass revolt by the farmers against the evils of railroads would solve their dilemma. Actually these conditions needed refined analysis on a broad scale, not the narrow crude approach of irate farmers. Much to their disbelief many companies had great difficulty staying in business.

The Grangers wanted a return to a kind of utopian Illinois, far more rural, simplistic, and fair in its existing

⁶² Chicago Tribune, June 6, 1879.

order. They tried to pressure Cullom by calling for more stringent legislation in the Railroad and Warehouse Commission and an increase in inflated currency, but they were too extreme for Cullom. His hand of prosperous agrarianism did not tolerate such measures. Certainly he saw virtues in their goals, but he believed the means they proposed were not sufficient to achieve their ends. He also saw the realities of power in business, and the benefits of technology. He was not prepared to turn his back on a new era in Illinois. His agrarianism told him to adapt to the changing environment, like most Illinois farmers.

The year 1880 showed Cullom again in a contest to perpetuate his political career. He was in a race for governor. Cullom was seeking a second consecutive term in office. This was something no governor had ever done before in Illinois. By the previous constitution a governor was not permitted to succeed himself. A partial exception was Governor August C. French. He was elected in 1846 and then reelected in 1848 for a four year term under the new constitution of that year.⁶³ Cullom was joined in his pursuit of the Republican nomination by General John I. Rinaker, Colonel Greenburg L. Fort, and General John C. Smith; Thomas S. Ridgway and Cullom were the only two candidates without military credentials.⁶⁴

⁶³ Illinois Blue Book 1967-1968, p.866.

⁶⁴ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p.56.

In April the campaign of 1880 found Cullom speaking to the Sangamon County Republican Convention. Cullom was discussing the issue of the South's attempts to reinstate the doctrine of state's rights in government. In the address he used the same tactics of waving the bloody shirt he had employed four years earlier. He again appeared to be trying to scare the party into unity. He discussed the Democratic Party and its alignment with the South. He told about the intimidation, violence, and murder of innocent men and women in the South. He recalled the principles of the Republican Party and its adherence to responsible government. Cullom gave the impression that to deny the Republican's election in 1880 could invite disaster to the nation. He also pleased the agrarian community by saying "All the public institutions have been kept within appropriations" ⁶⁵ issued to them.

As a candidate, Cullom showed his political savvy, Ulysses Grant and James Blaine of Maine were candidates for the Republican Party Presidential nomination. Logan was backing Grant, and Charles B. Farwell, a friend of Cullom's, was supporting Blaine. Both candidates were seeking Cullom's endorsement. Using the moderation he practiced on the Illinois prairie, Cullom wisely stayed aloof from either candidate. In this way, Cullom believed he could maintain a broader political base.

⁶⁵ An Address by Cullom to the Sangamon County Republican Convention, April 13, 1880.

On May 5th, however, this political agility of Cullom's was put to a severe test. Grant came to Springfield on that day, and he was greeted by Cullom and other leading Illinoisans. The group took Grant to the statehouse, and there a speech was to be made. Cullom feared any statements he might make would be viewed as an endorsement of Grant. Quickly he solicited the aid of John Palmer, a former Republican Governor and now a Democrat, to speak at the statehouse. Discretely Palmer gave a speech referring to Grant's great war record, but nothing was said about his years in the White House. It was a shrewd move by Cullom, because it left him uncommitted politically. This was one more reason why Cullom would survive so many years in public office. He knew how to play the middle of the road for his own benefit just like the Illinois agrarian.

In early May it was Cullom against the field. Of the 391 delegates already chosen Cullom forces said they had 163, while anti-Cullom people gave him only 56. This contrasted with the Springfield Register who gave Cullom 175 out of those already chosen, but they said he needed 150 of the remaining 258. The problem with this was 98 of these delegates were in Cook County where anti-Cullom factions resided. ⁶⁶ Governor Cullom realized if he was to gain the party nomination he could not do it on a first ballot. So he got his friends to get

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Springfield, Illinois State Register, May 9, 1880.

delegates committed to other candidates on the first ballot to support Cullom on second and third ballots. It was a smart move, and Cullom received the nomination. Cullom's victory was again secured by his agrarian strategy. He had used the same basic strategy of 1876, which was to campaign for downstate delegates.

Cullom waited until the late summer before he began campaigning for governor. First he entered northern Illinois where he spoke almost completely to rallies under the warm Illinois sun. Then he canvassed the rest of the state, going first to southern Illinois and then the counties along the Ohio River. Again he was on the Illinois prairie seeking the support of those people who were the backbone of his political career. By mid October the usually cautious Cullom was anticipating a victory by 25,000 votes.

Cullom's opposition was Lyman Trumbull a very competent politician, but he was a man who twice before switched party allegiances. Trumbull alienated many voters for supporting President Johnson during his impeachment trial. Cullom, on the other hand, was accused by the Democrats of extravagance in office. They did this, because Cullom's annual expenses in office were roughly equivalent to former Governor Yates' expenses for four years in office. This was an invalid charge. The frugal agrarian Cullom reduced the state debt in his first two years from \$1,478,600.27 to \$652,742.06. He further made plans to end the debt by 1881. Cullom was

even able to show a balance of \$2,012,223.96 on total revenues of \$8,650,052.14, and this was during a depression. ⁶⁷ If Cullom was guilty of anything, it was spending too little money in office, while a panic was covering Illinois.

Other Democratic newspapers accused Cullom of know nothingism, a popular movement in America against foreigners during the mid nineteenth century. Reference was made to Cullom's political inconsistency when he apparently tried to get Irish support, in his campaign, at a reception in Chicago. They tried to imply Cullom's know nothingism dated back to 1856. The accusation was untrue, but Cullom's own agrarian background and political associations with White Anglo Saxon Protestantism probably perpetuated the myth. In reality Cullom was a politician and appealed to the prejudices of his strongest supporters. It was all part of the traditional game of politics, telling the people what they want to hear. Cullom often did this in a vague manner, so he could remain flexible. When the votes were finally tallied Cullom received 314,565 and Trumbull 277,532 a plurality of 37,033 for Cullom. ⁶⁸

Delivering his biennial message on January 7, 1881, Cullom made another appeal of urgency for widening and deepening the Illinois-Michigan Canal. Cullom told the legislature any money they spent upon improving the canal

⁶⁷ Springfield, Illinois State Journal, January 11, 1879.

⁶⁸ Ibid., November 22, 1880.

would be returned to the state in benefits to the commerce of Illinois. He praised the Railroad and Warehouse Commission for their record in enforcing the state's regulations on railroads. At this point, Cullom seemed fairly pleased with the commission. It could be that Cullom believed Illinois now had sufficient laws in relation to this matter. As usual Cullom's moderate agrarianism tolerated only limited governmental involvement. This was the result of his early frontier attitudes formulated from the theories of Jeffersonian Democracy.

On agriculture, in his address, Cullom showed his concern for owners of livestock who suffered the destruction of disease to their animals. He called this livestock industry in Illinois the largest in the United States and second to no business in Illinois. He wanted these animals well protected by proper legislation, because he feared illness would jeopardize the health and welfare of Illinois and the nation. He also referred to the growing interests of the dairy industry in Illinois, due to the great number of cattle. 69

Three days later, Cullom delivered his inaugural message before the same body. This message was shorter than his biennial message but very optimistic. He said four years before when he took his oath of office the State was in dire circumstances. Cullom now believed that time was over, and

69 "Cullom's Biennial Message," Journal of the Illinois House of Representatives, January 7, 1881, pp. 22-32.

distress had been replaced by thousands of men returning to their jobs. This pleased Cullom, because his administration could take credit for this new era of prosperity.⁷⁰ In part Cullom probably deserves credit for giving the people of Illinois a sustaining confidence even in its darkest days. Cullom was a fighter; a man needed this spirit if he was going to survive that harsh Illinois frontier of Cullom's formative years in the 1830's and the 1840's. Sometimes a proper attitude is worth more than all the tools of technology and economics for a nation to recover from the depths of depression. This is what Cullom provided to the people of Illinois.

In 1882, Cullom was back on the campaign trail. This time he was trying to get support for Republican candidates who were up for election. At Chatsworth on September 16, he contrasted the Republican and Democratic parties traditional positions and emphasized the tariff. The tariff was always a major concern to this prairie politician, because he recognized its effect on the farmer at the market. He told his audience the Republican Party favored a tariff for two reasons. First it provided the country with revenue, and second it protected the country's commerce. He expressed a desire for this nation to be self sufficient in emergencies. He wished to make America not only an agricultural nation but also a manufacturing

⁷⁰ "Cullom's Inaugural Address," Journal of the Illinois House of Representatives, January 10, 1877, p. 48.

people. This reflects a condition in Illinois politics that had not existed before. It was now necessary for politicians like Cullom and Logan, from southern Illinois, to get right with wealthy industrialists from Chicago. Prosperous agrarian-oriented and ambitious politicians could afford it.

Cullom, however, was a moderate on the tariff. In later political life, as a United States Senator, he would continually advise caution to the Senate's protectionists, who favored high tariffs. His agrarian moderation preached restraint. Cullom knew hard responses against other nations on the tariff would only bring reprisals. Cullom saw value in the tariff as a source of revenue and protection of industry, but he disapproved of any increase in the existing tariff schedules of the nineteenth century.⁷¹ Cullom wished to enhance commerce, because he knew its value to the agrarian community in the shipment of goods to foreign markets. He was well aware of the need for a tariff, but he feared an overzealous approach by those in government whose only concern was big business. Cullom's attitudes on the tariff can best be explained in terms common to the agrarian. On the prairie a man learned to compromise with banks over financial matters, with his neighbors over land and water rights, and even with

⁷¹ Edward Stanwood, American Tariff Controversies in the Nineteenth Century (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company 1903), II, p.171.

nature over the kinds of crops he planted and when he planted them. Cullom transferred this policy of compacts to international relations.

Speaking at Bloomington on October 7th of that year, Cullom continued to plead the Republican Party's case. He said the Republicans stood for "freedom, progress, education, improvement, and equal rights of all classes, colors, and conditions." ⁷² In essence he was saying it was the Party of anything and everything considered good on the Illinois prairie. Further into his speech Cullom referred to Illinois great wealth attributed to her natural resources. He spoke of Illinois water routes, railroads, stable currency, and universal suffrage. All of these things sounded good to those Western men, who for so many years suffered from the harshness of their environment. He seemed to try and placate labor at Bloomington by telling the workers that the wages in America were twice what they were in Europe. He said that this is a nation of workingmen and freemen. By saying this he was subtly rejecting the concept of industrial unionism, so popular in many centers of industry around the state. In concluding his remarks, Cullom gave praise to the farmers and called their's a "noble avocation," while in the next breath calling for more railroads, mines, and factories. ⁷³ Once

⁷² Address by Governor Cullom, Bloomington, Ill., October 7, 1882.

⁷³ Ibid.

again Cullom had balanced his agrarianism with at least the realities of the late nineteenth century. He was not always happy with what was happening to his nostalgic boyhood frontier, but he realized change had both good and bad qualities and generally the good outweighs the bad. The result of Cullom's campaign efforts was a Republican victory. He enjoyed a solid majority of twelve in the legislature, 108 Republicans, 95 Democrats, and 1 Independent were elected. ⁷⁴

Everything in Cullom's life, however, was not politics. He did have a wife and children, one of whom was a daughter named Ella. On October 24, 1882 she married William Barrett Ridgely. It probably pleased Cullom that his daughter married young Ridgely. He was the grandson of Nicholas Ridgely who was an early Illinois settler. It was this Ridgely who sold the state of Illinois the land on which the statehouse was built. Furthermore William Ridgely's father Charles Ridgely founded the Springfield Iron Company then in existence. This was quite important to the property rights oriented Cullom who often judged a person by the accomplishments he achieved through the hard work and personal pride of those early Illinois plainsmen.

The wedding was a gala affair for the more established and wealthy families of Springfield. The marriage took place at the Presbyterian Church in that city. Again this event

⁷⁴ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p.60.

reflects Cullom's natural orientation with people. Had the young man been the son of poor Catholic immigrant parents from Chicago, the occasion would probably have been less than festive. Sometimes a man's basic attitudes can best be seen in the behavior of his offspring. Cullom was not a social snob, but like Everett Dirksen later he unconsciously seemed to gravitate toward people of wealth, property, and position. The result was public utterances by Cullom that adhered to the philosophy of the prairie and also pleased those in positions of prestige and financial power, people like the Ridgely's of Springfield. Quite apparently, Cullom's Illinois agrarianism was protecting the state's wealthier classes.

As governor, Cullom displayed a unique liberalism in relation to the state's penal code. From what has been said earlier about Cullom's law and order background, one could surmise that Cullom would hold to harsh penalties for anyone accused of committing a crime. This, however, was not true. On the contrary, Cullom, in administering the state's penal code, granted some 250 pardons. This record was considered very liberal when compared to former governor's. Cullom also took great care in returning prisoners to other states for trial. He refused to concede to requests by other governors until he made a thorough investigation of the facts. Out of 574 requests for prisoners, he returned only 193. ⁷⁵ At first

⁷⁵ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p.61.

glance, this makes Cullom look somewhat paradoxical in relation to his agrarian attitudes, but on reconsideration his actions do carry a quality of frontier Illinois. The prairie often taught people to learn to forgive and forget grievances. There were no benighted people on the early prairie, but they did build and shape a harsh land so that their children could have a better life. Cullom knew these kinds of rugged individualists, and in the back of his mind he probably hoped many of the men he was giving pardons to would eventually give society similar proud citizens; people who were not Saints only men, but people who could change just like their earlier predecessors.

Sometime in the second year of his second term in office, Cullom decided his future in state politics was finished. He was a fairly popular governor, but he knew his chances at getting reelected to a third term were very poor. The people of Illinois still held tenaciously to the Jeffersonian concept that public offices should be passed around from time to time. They did not want one man in office for a great many years. So Cullom considered seeking the party nomination for a seat in the United States Senate in 1883. By doing this Cullom felt fairly sure he could remain in elected office.

Cullom's bid for the senatorship was no secret in Illinois, but some people felt the new senator should be from Chicago rather than downstate. Rumors circulated, though, that the railroad leaders were anxious to get the agrarian Cullom

out of the state. Finally Cullom announced his candidacy in a contest which included Richard Oglesby, General Green B. Raum, and General T. J. Anderson for the Republican Party nomination. The race, however, quickly narrowed down to a contest between Cullom and Raum.

In the meantime, Cullom delivered his biennial message to the General Assembly January 5, 1883. In this address, he called for construction of the Hennepin Canal. He believed it would offer railroads good competition for commerce. He also restated his strong agrarian position when he said: "Agriculture is now and always will be the chief industrial and productive interest of Illinois, the foundation of our material prosperity." ⁷⁶ He asked the state legislature to do something about the atrocious conditions of many roads around the state. This was Cullom's last message to the General Assembly, and he wanted to make sure the agrarians of the state received his best efforts right to the end. By making one final plea for farmers' interests he could thank them for supporting his administration.

It was now Tuesday, January 9th, and friends of Cullom were giving him 49 votes in the General Assembly while Raum forces said publicly that Cullom had only 40. He needed 54 to win. When the balloting finally began Cullom received 44 votes on the first ballot, but it was not until the fifth ballot

⁷⁶ "Cullom's Biennial Message," Journal of the Illinois House of Representatives, January 5, 1883, p. 30.

that he received enough votes. Cullom won the party nomination with 63 votes. Oglesby finished second with 23 votes. The downstate faction was too powerful for Chicago Republicans, and the party leaders decided Cullom's influence with people of the Illinois prairie was too great to challenge.⁷⁷

Meanwhile the Democrats chose John M. Palmer as their party nominee. Palmer was no match for Cullom. The legislature was heavily Republican and the final tally of votes gave Cullom a first ballot victory with 107 votes.⁷⁸ Now Cullom would launch a career in the United States Senate that would keep him there longer than any other man in the history of Illinois. For thirty years Shelby Cullom would serve the interests of the Illinois prairie in Interstate Commerce, foreign affairs, and moderate tariffs as a United States Senator.

Cullom's governorship was a fairly good one. One area Cullom seemed particularly proud was in the executive department where not one single scandal was ever reported. This pleased him greatly, because he could take a record to the agrarians of Illinois showing them he was an honest man, especially at a time when people were very cynical about the integrity of politicians.

As governor Cullom's relations with the legislature were quite cordial. He never tried to organize or dictate to the legislature, an exception being his effort to save the

⁷⁷ Chicago Tribune, January 10 and 12, 1883.

⁷⁸ Ibid., January 18, 1883.

Railroad and Warehouse Commission in 1879. Yet he was very fortunate in that he had legislatures who listened to his recommendations. This was because his friends worked hard to put the right men in office. So skillful was Cullom with legislators that without creating any division between people he could influence their thinking and receive support for various proposals. In his usual agrarian manner, Cullom sought harmony and order, because he knew it was necessary for any form of justice. His own experiences on the prairie taught him fair play could only be achieved through a stable structure. Cullom did not rock the boat too hard in the legislature, because he feared it might capsize. On his governorship Cullom said:

I believed then, and I believe now, in the independence of the three coordinate branches of the Government. I no more thought of influencing the Legislature than I would have thought of attempting to influence the Judiciary. My recommendations were made in official messages, as the Constitution prescribes, and generally, I might say, the Legislature carried out my recommendations. The administration was an economical one, and it was during this period that the entire State debt was paid. 79

79 Cullom, p. 168.

CHAPTER IV

CULLOM'S THIRTY YEARS

in the

UNITED STATES SENATE

The purpose of Chapter IV is to show how Cullom's basic agrarian attitudes were transferred in various other areas of government. This was during his remaining thirty years as a United States Senator. When Cullom first entered the Senate he had three basic projects in mind; an act to regulate interstate commerce, the building of the Hennepin Canal, and an end to polygamy among Mormons in Utah. Eventually all three would be achieved, and their agrarian significance is mentioned in this chapter.

This chapter also has a chronological discussion of those most important events of Cullom's Senatorial career and how they relate to his Illinois agrarianism. Among these were his appointment as head of the Hawaiian Commission in 1898, his role as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, his disgust with gifts and presents to American officials in foreign countries, and his last days as a United States Senator when he lost his interest in the present and regressed to the past.

The third part of this chapter includes a summary of Cullom and Illinois agrarianism. This section tries to show the various tenets which made up Cullom's midwestern attitude. Some of the forces were such popular nineteenth century concepts as Jeffersonian Democracy, rugged individualism, a strong belief in law and order, and property rights and free enterprise. These various beliefs go together to form a balance of power between industrial and agricultural Illinois, a problem for Cullom in government throughout his years in the United States Senate.

The regulation of interstate commerce would be Cullom's most significant achievement in government. Delegated to the obscure committee on railroads when he first entered the Senate, Cullom quickly rose to the position of Chairman on that committee. Its only purpose then was to recognize one of the nation's most important interest groups. Needless to say, Cullom was not satisfied with these functions. For years he heard pleas from the agrarian community to put an end to rate discrimination by railroads. Now Cullom had the chance to do something about these atrocious conditions. He was aware several states like Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa had commissions regulating railroad commerce in their particular states, but many states lacked any laws at all.⁸⁰ Cullom believed through federal regulation the government could better slow down the abuse by railroads toward the farming community. It was a good move politically too for the downstate Senator who knew this would please his Illinois constituents.

If the desire for an interstate commerce law was politically sound in Illinois, it was not greeted with any great excitement by his colleagues in the Senate. Cullom found little interest in the bill among even his closest friends in the Senate. His Senatorial cohort from Illinois, John Logan, told Cullom he would ruin himself politically by

⁸⁰ John Hicks, The American Nation (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p.136.

pursuing such legislation. Cullom, however, was determined to prove them wrong.

Finally Cullom was aided by Senator William Boyd Allison of Iowa who told him the Senate needed more knowledge in this area. Allison believed a committee should examine the problems of interstate commerce and report back to the Senate. He thought the Senators needed facts about railroad discrimination in rates. Cullom considered Allison's recommendation sensible. It was the most logical thing to do, since even Cullom knew little about the railroad situation outside Illinois.

As a result, on March 16, 1885, Cullom requested the Senate to set up a committee of five senators to investigate interstate commerce. The Senate seemed none too eager to pass Cullom's resolution, but after some debate the proposal was accepted. Cullom was selected chairman with Senators George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts, Warner Miller of New York, Arthur Pue Gorman of Maryland, and Isham G. Harris of Tennessee completing the committee. Cullom, Hoar, and Miller were Republicans, while Gorman and Harris were Democrats. ⁸¹

The committee crossed the country looking into railroad rates. By 1886, it had finished its investigation and reported back to the Senate. According to the committee three fourths

⁸¹ Matthew Josephson, The Politicos (New York, 1938), p.389.

of all railroad business came under the heading of interstate commerce, and there were four possible ways to deal with the situation: (1) private ownership and management, but with more effective governmental regulation, (2) governmental ownership and management, (3) governmental ownership and private management under public regulation, and (4) governmental ownership and management in competition with private companies. The committee under Cullom's moderate agrarian direction recommended the first approach. ⁸²

In retrospect, it is not surprising that Cullom would advocate no more than governmental regulation. This was completely consistent with Cullom's natural tendency to protect the free enterprise system. Cullom and the Illinois agrarian believed strongly that by protecting the freedoms of business they were protecting a free society. Cullom did not want the rights of industry jeopardized, because he feared such intervention could eventually bring a demise to representative government. Even regulation of rate discrimination was a hard ideological question for Cullom to resolve, because he saw its inconsistency with Jeffersonian Democracy.

In one way Cullom was advocating governmental involvement, and in another way he feared too much interference. Actually limited controls was the logical solution

for this agrarian moderate from Illinois. Even some railroad leaders like Charles E. Perkins, vice president of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy, and J.C. Clark, president of the Illinois Central, cooperated with Cullom.⁸³ Cullom desired to give the nation's commerce some order, because this was part of the Illinois prairie, too. For these reasons, Cullom would go so far and no further with interstate commerce regulation.

Railroads were exploiting the agrarian when he sent his grain to market, but the farmer saw how much quicker and easier this new form of transportation was for him. The building of farm implements, like industrialist Cyrus McCormick's reapers in Chicago, and making them easily accessible was pleasing to the plainsman. The railroads definitely upgraded his life on the prairie. He wanted to protect these new conveniences. The Illinois farmer realized his was a better world to live in than his father's and grandfather's had been. He did not want to lose this by reckless hasty action, so compromise and moderation similar to Cullom's interstate commerce recommendation was desired by the farmer.

On the Hennepin Canal, Cullom began his fight for this legislation early in his Senatorial career. Cullom had visions of a massive canal system that would connect Lake

⁸³ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, pp. 114-115.

Michigan with the Mississippi River. He believed this would benefit commerce not only for Illinois, but for the entire midwest. The Hennepin project alone was expected to cost \$6,700,000. ⁸⁴ Congress, however, was not impressed with this agrarian statesman's proposal. They thought it sounded like a lot of money, and they were not about to appropriate those kind of finances. The project was temporarily defeated, but through the years money slowly trickled in until by 1907 it was completed. The canal, however, was never what Cullom envisioned. The construction of the canal was not justified in relation to its cost to taxpayers. ⁸⁵ Railroads were preferred in shipping, because of their speed and generally closer proximity to industry.

In the Senate Cullom demonstrated a certain provincialism when he fought to end polygamy among Mormons in Utah. This was something Cullom was bitterly opposed to in his earlier days as a Congressman. Cullom proposed an amendment in December of 1883 that would turn the government of Utah away from the peoples' control and place it under the authority of men appointed by the federal government. Most of his colleagues considered this extreme. Cullom believed the Mormons were fanatics who enslaved their followers and if not stopped could eventually rule over five or six western states. His role over

⁸⁴ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p. 71.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

this issue could hardly be called moderate. Why he chose this issue and became so emotionally involved is difficult to answer but the reason may have existed on the Illinois prairie.

Cullom like the Illinois farmer thought of right and wrong in relation to his own environment. He did not realize one man's immorality might be another man's morality. He seemed obsessed with preserving the sanctity of monogamous marriages. He feared any challenge to it, because Mormonism might threaten his own attitudes about good and evil and destroy all his beliefs. Eventually legislation was passed to put a halt to their practices, but it was difficult to enforce. The only thing government could do was restrict the younger generations of Mormons from following the examples set by their elders. Furthermore, Cullom probably believed the Mormon social structure did pose a real threat to representative government. Some of these prejudices could have developed from his early childhood when the Mormons resided at Nauvoo, and people were afraid they were going to take over the government of Illinois.

In Washington Cullom was always highly thought of and considered one of the Senate's most influential members. He was not, however, a leader. Cullom was too colorless for such a role in government. The Senator seemed to plod along too slowly and meticulously for people to find his career very attractive. To some he was probably considered a country hick. Cullom was described as no one's first choice and everyone's second choice.

It was this lack of initiative that kept Cullom from being a candidate for the Presidency. Cullom believed the office should pursue the man, not vice versa. Yet from time to time he would be mentioned as a possible Presidential candidate, especially during the elections of 1888, 1892, and 1896. Cullom seemed to hold to a more traditional view of the Presidency. He, no doubt, believed it was the highest honor any American could achieve, and so it should not be harmed in the political arena. The Presidency had a quality of reverence to Cullom, especially after Lincoln held the office. Cullom was not interested in tarnishing the memory of Lincoln by abrasive campaign tactics. He always said he would like to be President, but he would never pursue it. The Illinois prairie taught Cullom to respect Lincoln, and this meant respecting the position that made Lincoln famous.

Another area where Cullom's agrarianism manifested itself was in foreign policy. In 1898 President McKinley was trying to determine whether the territory of Hawaii should be admitted to statehood. McKinley finally decided to set up a commission and investigate the matter. He selected Cullom to lead the group which consisted of Alabama Senator John T. Morgan, Robert Hitt an Illinois Congressman, and two Hawaiians: Sanford B. Dole a former President of the Republic of Hawaii and Walter F. Frear a member of the Hawaiian Supreme Court. ⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Cullom, p. 287.

Upon arriving in Hawaii on August 17, 1898, Cullom, Morgan, and Hitt were greeted by Dole and Frear at Honolulu. Cullom was interested in three basic questions. Was Hawaii prepared for statehood? Could oriental labor jeopardize job markets in Hawaii and the United States? What kind of government was best for Hawaii? Cullom found out that Hawaii had over 100,000 people, but close to one fourth were Japanese, one fifth Chinese, one sixth Portuguese, and about 39,000 of Hawaiian mixtures. He further learned only 6 per cent of the people were from American or British background. ⁸⁷ When the committee finally reported back to the President, Congress, and the Senate, they advised against statehood. Cullom believed the present form of government could not be changed for many years. He further reasoned it would be impossible to defend against foreign aggression, the white population was too small, and there were few educated natives. Cullom did believe, however, the islands were vastly important to America as fueling stations for trans-oceanic steamers, and that someday Hawaii would be ready for a place in the Union. He regretted Congress's refusal to improve Pearl Harbor and fortify the islands. ⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Shelby M. Cullom Davis, A Patriot's Way (Princeton, N.J., 1958), p. 13. This is a Senior Thesis.

⁸⁸ Cullom, pp. 289-290.

Cullom believed in the expansionist policies of the United States government at that time, but he was hesitant to over react to any policy. The Senator knew from his own experiences on the Illinois prairie how difficult it was to establish a system of democracy. He also realized in 1818 Illinois had some advantages Hawaii never had for statehood in 1898. Illinois had a large population of people who understood the concepts of representative government, a territory that was situated on the continental United States not in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and people whose national allegiances were with America rather than Hawaii's problem of large groups of Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese. It was just too much for the agrarian Cullom to accept. He simply thought Hawaii's participation in the government of the United States would be less an asset and more a liability.⁸⁹

Another interesting part of Cullom's trip to Hawaii was how tenaciously he held on to the expense account money provided for the commission. The conservative agrarian Cullom forbade any lavish entertaining at the public's expense. Gay, old Commissioner Dole and the "gentleman" Senator from Alabama, Morgan, were disgusted with Cullom over this action. Congress appropriated the commission \$100,000 for expenses, but Cullom's tight grip on finances enabled him to return \$85,000 to the

⁸⁹ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, p. 198.

treasury.⁹⁰ This was typical of the agrarian Cullom. On the prairie he learned the value of money from behind a plow. He knew how hard people worked to earn a living income. Then he saw these same people pay more than their fair share of taxes. This made Cullom respectful of the people's tax dollar. He was not about to turn it over to some fun loving commission members who thought their position entitled them to such privileges. Cullom only allowed the necessary money for reasonable expenses. The commission went to Hawaii for business not pleasure, and Cullom was not going to tolerate a change in the original intentions.

For years Cullom was Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Committee, while maintaining a seat on the prestigious Foreign Relations Committee. Finally in 1901 Senate turnover in membership reached the point where Cullom was in position for Chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee. A Senate rule, however, stated a person could only be chairman of one committee. The result was that Cullom would be forced to resign from the Interstate Commerce Committee if he wanted the new job. It was a hard choice for Cullom. President Roosevelt encouraged him to stay with Interstate Commerce. He explained to Cullom his desire to strengthen the Cullom Act of 1887,⁹¹ which still had many loop holes related to

⁹⁰ Cullom, pp. 288-289.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 295.

interstate commerce. Cullom, however, was angry with the committee, since most of its members favored inaction on any amendments. Cullom did not feel useful in his role as Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Committee. He finally decided to resign and become Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations.

Actually the real reason Roosevelt wanted Cullom to stay with interstate commerce was to make way for the illustrious Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts who was next in line for the foreign relations job. Both Roosevelt and Lodge agreed he, Lodge, was the best man for the job. Lodge contrasted well with Cullom. He was of aristocratic heritage, educated at Harvard, urbane, and sophisticated. Lodge wanted the job badly. It was, no doubt, frustrating for him to see the rural oriented, poorly educated, and colorless Cullom take the position. As for Cullom, he would head the committee for twelve years, longer than any other man before him.

On the Foreign Relations Committee, Cullom would bring with him the same moderation he shared with the Illinois farmer. He would be an expansionist on foreign policy, but he would also advise caution. He envisioned America's role as a world leader, and he wanted her borders well fortified with a strong navy. In reality his views were similar to Lodge's, but their temperaments were poles apart. Lodge was a domineering personality. He was more sure of himself on foreign policy than Cullom.

As Chairman Cullom was not a forceful person, but he did probe and search for the best answers to America's foreign policy. Cullom tried to create a spirit of cooperation between the legislative and executive branches over foreign relations. He tried to be more a statesman and less partisan in his new role. His lack of strong leadership made him less arrogant than a Lodge, probably, would have been, but it also created a good atmosphere for dialogue which the Jeffersonian Cullom always favored. As usual he lacked the glamor of a front page figure, but his work was credible. This was again Cullom's prairie attitudes coming forth. The Illinois farmer believed it was more important to achieve results than put on a good show for your neighbors.

In June of 1904, Cullom was in Springfield commemorating the new Lincoln Library. On this occasion, Cullom called education very integral to our free society. He said it was more necessary to a republic than to a monarchy where the people are not sovereign. Then he remarked how fortunate the young people of that time were to possess such facilities. Cullom told of his own youth on the Illinois prairie when libraries were not part of the frontier and small towns of Illinois.⁹² Cullom favored this even more since he knew Illinois would benefit from the books read by the young.

⁹² An Address Delivered By Senator Cullom at the Lincoln Library, June 7, 1904.

Again Cullom's underlying agrarian motives come into view. He saw how the agrarians lacked many of the opportunities of the urban centers and how this hurt them socially, economically and politically in Illinois. Cullom wanted to prepare the rural areas for the future, so they would be more competent in the protection of their interests. Senator Cullom believed the building of libraries was one of the most resourceful ways this could be done.

Around the turn of the century America began to fight back against the power of big business. For years industry dominated the American system of free enterprise. Now the trust busting Theodore Roosevelt wanted to correct this imbalance. In the Senate, Cullom would be alienated from this new era of progressive politicians. Unlike many of the officials in government Cullom was not out to crush the system of trusts in American business. On the other hand, this man from the prairie would not try to defend them. He was too well acquainted with business tactics from his own experiences with railroads. His basic belief was that government should try to realign trusts within the traditional framework of universal equality and free enterprise. He did not want the trust system destroyed, but he did believe many of the injustices it created in the business world should be outlawed. He thought by protecting trusts he was protecting property rights and a free society. Cullom feared the Senate might pass some kind of legislation that

would ultimately do more harm than good. It was again Cullom adhering to the philosophy that the government that governs least governs best. He feared strong controls on business could eventually arrive at strong controls on the rest of society, and he possessed too much of the prairie's rugged individualism to allow the people's freedoms to be impaired by strong government.

The beginning of a more powerful central government frightened Cullom as Roosevelt's policies became more accepted in American society. This liberal of the Johnson days, now found himself encamped with the Senate's conservatives. From his experiences on the Illinois prairie he believed a fairly decentralized government was basic to the preservation of human liberties.

Cullom preferred to give opinions on public issues only after the most thorough research. This careful conscientious agrarian thinker resented the behavior of this new era of progressives. He considered them demagogues who showed little respect even in the Senate. He was bitter about the rabble rousing tactics they used across the nation. Cullom thought these new progressives found immorality everywhere except on their own doorstep. To him they were bigots using moral issues for their own self seeking ends. ⁹³

⁹³ Nielson, Cullom, Prairie State Republican, pp. 296-297.

The main area of conflict between Cullom and the progressives seemed to be between property and human rights. Cullom probably saw property rights incidental to human rights as justice is the result of order. In reality Cullom favored both property and human rights. Cullom's problem was he was not as sensitive to human rights as the progressives. This was, probably, because they were not in as great a jeopardy on the Illinois prairie as in many of the nation's urban centers. Cullom was not well acquainted with the problems of the city like poor housing, unsanitary working conditions, and industry's abuse of child and female labor. For these reasons he could not accept the methods of massive governmental involvement being used to challenge these aspects of human degradation. All of this was foreign to the man from the prairie. Cullom seemed to take justice and human rights too much for granted, because such appalling conditions were not as great on the frontier.

In 1903, Cullom's wife Julia suffered an impairing stroke. For months her condition fluctuated between good and bad. Finally on August 18, of that year, she died. ⁹⁴ It was a hard blow to Cullom. Throughout his long political career he depended upon her greatly. She was a fine hostess and handled the affairs of a Senator's wife with dignity and propriety. Her death left a tremendous void in Cullom's

⁹⁴ Davis, Patriot's Way, p.83.

life. By his own admission it was the greatest sorrow he ever had to withstand.

On November 22, 1909, Cullom celebrated his 80th birthday. It was difficult, however, for him to feel much excitement after the death of his wife. Gradually Cullom withdrew from his functions as a United States Senator. He lost the spirit for his work. Cullom was now a lonely man. Like many lonely people who knew happier days, he began to recall his fondest memories. He thought about his early childhood in Tazewell County, the deer he could not kill because it looked so innocent, and the local schoolhouse where as a boy they sat on crudely built benches and whispered at the girls.⁹⁵ It was all returning to Cullom and logically enough Lincoln was at its center. The more Cullom remembered the more illuminating Lincoln became to him. Cullom was reverting back to those parts of his life most important to his career. The years on the Illinois prairie when his basic attitudes were taking shape. Now most of his friends were dead. The world was changing into a place he no longer recognized or cared anything about personally. Sometimes he would counsel young men of ambition and tell them to stay out of public office, because they would eventually become either "paupers or thieves."⁹⁶ His financial condition was

⁹⁵ Cullom, p. 5.

⁹⁶ Chicago Tribune, April 7, 1912.

meager. Public life had robbed him of wealth. Cullom sacrificed much personally for the interests of Illinois agrarianism.

There was still, however, some fire in the old man. One of Cullom's chief pet peeves was for years the way the United States Government allowed their officials to receive presents and honors from other countries. In 1910, Cullom tried to bring this practice to a halt. Over two hundred cases accumulated with his Foreign Relations Committee. Cullom told the committee to accept only those most deserving or "adopt a general rule against the whole practice." ⁹⁷ Cullom recognized the founding fathers' wisdom in rejecting this kind of activity. He believed such practices might burden a man's relations with a particular country and impair any decision he made in relation to that nation. Finally Cullom submitted his problem to a subcommittee. The committee reported back it was not in favor of destroying this action entirely. They did, however, approve more stringent rulings on acceptance of gifts. Presents could be accepted for only the highest services rendered. This did not completely please Cullom, but it was better than the previous practice. Again this shows Cullom's agrarian tendency. He knew how easily men could be swayed when their

vanity was flattered by gifts. Time and again people would fail on the early prairie because they trusted the wrong person. Cullom did not want this same naivete to exist in foreign relations. Enemies of the United States Government could often use tactics like this to endanger the country's security. Foreign relations was just as lawless as the early prairie, and one had to be on guard for unscrupulous acts.

In 1912, Cullom was up for reelection. On November 22, of that year he would be 83 years old. He was tired and spiritless, but friends wanted him to run again. A year earlier he was adamant about not running, but now he seemed concerned about holding the state's Republican Party together. At last he decided to run for office again. Cullom evidently believed he had a real chance at winning reelection, but he was instructed by doctors to remain in Washington. Two other candidates opposed him for the Republican primary April 9, 1912. Cullom depended upon his machine which had been effective for so many years . It was, however, the end of the road for Cullom. He was a feeble old man, and he could not hold his campaign together. The whole campaign was a shamle. When the votes were finally tallied he was defeated by 60,000 votes. ⁹⁸ The people of the Illinois prairie wanted a younger man. Many of Cullom's strongest supporters

⁹⁸ Henry A. Converse, "The Life and Services of Shelby M. Cullom," p. 67.

were now dead. His political base had eroded badly in recent years, and it was an age that Cullom never completely comprehended.

Cullom served fifty two years in public office at the local, state, and federal levels. Why Cullom stayed in office so many years was no great mystery. The people kept reelecting him, because he was hard-working, honest, and represented the mid-western views of the Illinois prairie. Cullom was also fortunate in that the state legislature was always Republican in those years from 1883 to 1906 when his name was submitted not to the people but to the General Assembly for election. Furthermore, as Senator he had tremendous patronage. Cullom used this wisely in each district and county across the Illinois prairie where attorneys, judges, revenue collectors, marshalls, and other local officials were doing their duty for him at election time. Interestingly enough though, Cullom never used this political machine for any issues or other candidates. For years the machine would lie dormant, and then suddenly when Cullom was up for election it would move into action. This was how the cautious Cullom operated on the Illinois prairie. He was not interested in any issue or politician that might damage his career by harming the machine.

With his remaining days Cullom had only one ambition. He wanted a memorial built to Abraham Lincoln in Washington. At Cullom's request Congress gave \$50,000 for a commission consisting of President Taft, three Senators, and three

Representatives. They were to find an architect who could design the Lincoln Memorial for not more than \$2,000,000. ⁹⁹ It was Cullom's last and greatest tribute to Lincoln who personified the virtues of the Illinois prairie as much as any man who ever crossed its plains. In a larger sense it was not only a tribute to Lincoln but to the environment that produced him.

Cullom never saw the completion of the Lincoln Memorial, because on January 28, 1914, he died quietly in Washington D.C. ¹⁰⁰ He was taken to Springfield to lie in state, before he was finally buried there at Oak Ridge Cemetery with his two wives and four children on a hill just east of Lincoln's tomb.

Now the Illinois prairie would search for new leaders to represent their interests. But it would be the attitudes of Shelby Cullom and the Illinois agrarian that would really be important to the state's future leaders. Cullom's moderation and downstate orientation can easily be seen in the political career of Senator Everett Dirksen. Cullom's desire for law and order is poignantly expressed in the midwestern attitudes of the illustrious Dirksen. This same desire for a stable society and evolutionary not revolutionary change has continued in Illinois through leaders like Dirksen. Nevertheless, Dirksen seemed more contemptuous of the people than Cullom ever was.

⁹⁹ Davis, A Patriot's Way, p. 96.

¹⁰⁰ Springfield, Illinois State Journal, January 27, 28, 29, 1914.

Shelby Cullom's political career represented many different beliefs unique to the Illinois prairie. Examples of these attitudes were Jeffersonian Democracy, rugged individualism, hardwork and thrift, reform rather than revolution, law and order, property rights and free enterprise, and a strong moral code based upon religious fundamentalism. Within the context of these many different tenets lay the bulk of Shelby Cullom and the Illinois agrarian. Most of these philosophies grew out of an earlier America where they were considered right for their time in society. Cullom's basic concepts of life seem to be built around these beliefs, and his actions as a political animal do not stray far from these attitudes.

His political record was generally what is known as a middle of the road approach. Some political observers accused him of straddling the fence, but actually he was a consensus politician trying to represent the wishes of all the people. Being a politician from both an agricultural and industrial state like Illinois made this necessary.

His various positions on many major issues see him continuously fluctuating between conservative industrialism and liberal agrarian ideology. When in the Senate he gave credence to those who called him a conservative when he supported the Payne-Aldrich Tariff and ridiculed progressives for their pompous display of demagoguery both in the Senate and across the nation. Then he did an about face from his conservative allies when he supported the Sherman Anti Trust Act, the Hepburn Bill, and the

income tax measures. These pieces of legislation were all very popular in the Senate's liberal circles. As a result Cullom does a kind of balancing act between the powerful forces of industry and the less strong but more numerous agrarian populus. His position on corporations during Theodore Roosevelt's trust busting days best exemplifys Cullom's balance. He did not want to destroy these huge conglomerates like many progressives, but he did advocate structural reform which many pro industry conservatives shyed away from at that time. Like the Illinois agrarian, Cullom tried to preserve and yet reform the existing order.

Cullom was basically a man of the prairie. So consequently when his political career neared its end in the early twentieth century, it was difficult for him to accept the new trends in government concerning urbanism and industrialism. His natural orientation was with the quiet plains of the midwest not the confusion of the city.

Cullom seems to have had a genuine fondness for people like many of his agrarian constituents. He did not, however, display it in a very colorful manner. Rather it was in face to face encounters with people that Cullom showed his greatest intimacy and secured the most confidence from individuals. This was another manifestation of the prairie.

Cullom was a pragmatic politician, but many of his ideological committments seemed steeped in a kind of utilitarian attitude. In spite of his political pragmatism, he was not afraid to vote

for the best interests of the people, rather than the best interests of Shelby Cullom. In this sense he had the integrity his constituents expected from public figures. This same honesty was a hallmark to his political career. Through the years, the people of Illinois recognized and appreciated these attributes of Cullom's.

Another example of Cullom's devotion to the people of Illinois was his financial sacrifices for public office. If he had remained in the practice of law rather than politics, his personal wealth would have been much greater. Before leaving his law practice in Springfield Cullom had made a great deal of money, but he spent it in the ensuing years as United States Senator.

Few would call Cullom a humanitarian, but somewhere in that reticent man there was a compassion for the interests of the people. Why else did he do so much for so very little reward. Certainly the prestige of being a United States Senator was pleasing to his sense of self importance, but it hardly seems a completely adequate answer. Especially since he did not seem to wallow in publicity. Furthermore hardwork was always characteristic of his career in government. Actually Cullom cared a great deal about the people of Illinois and the United States. This is probably why he remained in political life.

In the career of Shelby Cullom is seen the basis of American Democracy and how it operates; a system of gradual change and compromise. This is especially true of the State of Illinois. Illinois is now a state that Cullom envisioned so

many years ago; a state strong in agriculture, industry, and commerce. Through moderation and cautious reform everyone in the state has reaped the harvest of prosperity. By compromising, Illinois learned to accept more than one position. It is this diversity that has made Illinois strong, and Shelby Cullom's attitudes, if not popular, more importantly enduring. As Cullom was a compromiser of various interests, so is the State of Illinois.

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