

CHARLES CURTIS OF KANSAS:  
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, 1929-1933

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DIVISION OF  
SOCIAL SCIENCE AND THE GRADUATE COUNCIL OF THE  
KANSAS STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE OF EMPORIA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF SCIENCE

BY

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AUGUST, 1960

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The year 1960 marks the centennial of the birth of the only man with an appreciable amount of Indian blood ever to become Vice President of the United States. In the nearly one-hundred years of Kansas history only once has a Kansan been elected Vice President. That man was Charles Curtis. He was the first native of Kansas to represent the State in the United States Senate. For these reasons an investigation of his life is of special interest at this time.

This study deals with Charles Curtis who devoted the major portion of his seventy-six years of life (1860-1936) to holding public office. He reached the height of his career with the Vice Presidency during the administration of Herbert Hoover, 1929-1933. Curtis was a shrewd politician who maintained the support of Kansas voters through such political techniques as the keeping of a card file of constituents with whom he had contact. During his years in Congress he became a leader and a real power in the shaping of legislation. Throughout his career Curtis was a Republican of unquestioned regularity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James C. Malin, Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), XXII, supplement 2, 136-137, hereafter cited DAB.



The purpose of this study is: (1) to bring together the scattered biographical materials that are concerned with Charles Curtis; (2) to consider in depth his career during the years 1928-1933; and (3) to evaluate his political philosophy and contribution to American politics.

This study is important because, even though Curtis enjoyed a long political career, no definitive biography has been published.<sup>2</sup> Scattered biographical sketches and items mentioning Curtis are to be found, especially in books written by his contemporaries and in the pre-convention prognostications of journalists during the years when Curtis was seeking nomination for national office. It is important to bring these bits of information together to serve as a beginning point for future definitive work. Furthermore, these sources are not always in agreement. An understanding of the role played by Curtis will contribute to an understanding of political events on both the State and the national levels during the initial one-third of the twentieth century.

In terms of the life of Curtis primary sources are limited. The Kansas Historical Society has a small collection

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<sup>2</sup>Except a campaign biography, Don C. Seitz, From Kaw Teepee to Capital: The Life Story of Charles Curtis, Indian, Who Has Risen to High Estate (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1928).



of Curtis letters.<sup>3</sup> The Kansas Historical Society has sent some Curtis mementos to Council Grove, Kansas, to form part of a museum display.<sup>4</sup> This museum has one Curtis letter. Curtis was not noted for speech-making prior to 1928 nor did he often have his name attached to legislative enactments; hence, those sources yield few facts. Newspaper accounts must suffice in most instances. This means, of course, that contemporary sources of his early life are practically non-existent. Professor Malin states that "very little reliable data are easily available about the Curtis family connections or the spelling of names, not even Charles and Dolly

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<sup>3</sup>Curtis Collection, Kansas Historical Society. These letters were donated by the Curtis estate. Most of the letters are of negligible value. During the years since the death of Curtis several individuals, acting under the auspices of the Kansas Historical Society, have carried on considerable correspondence with the surviving members of the Curtis family, attempting to locate and obtain access to the remainder of the papers of Curtis. The most recent communication the Kansas Historical Society has received located the papers with the daughter of Curtis, Mrs. Webster Knight. She insisted that everything of "historical value" was sent to the Kansas Historical Society and stated emphatically that under no circumstance would she allow anyone to go through the papers remaining in her possession. Letters from other members of the family have always supported this position.

<sup>4</sup>"Old Kaw Indian Mission," State museum, Council Grove, Kansas. Items displayed include an oil painting of Charles Curtis, several gavels, the silver tray presented to him when he retired from the Vice Presidency, the personal flag of Vice-President Curtis, and one letter, Curtis to Brigham.

[Curtis Gann] being in agreement on some things, and peculiar gaps exist in family history."<sup>5</sup> Berlin B. Chapman wrote an excellent article dealing with Curtis and the Kaw Reservation lands. He gives a detailed account of Curtis's influence on the policy of the national government in dealing with Kaw Indian lands.<sup>6</sup> This article and the biographical sketch by Professor Malin are the only scholarly works devoted primarily to Curtis that this writer has discovered.

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<sup>5</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136, footnote.

<sup>6</sup>Berlin B. Chapman, "Charles Curtis and the Kaw Reservation," The Kansas Historical Quarterly, XV (November, 1947), 337-351.



## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The later years of the life of Charles Curtis were well known to interested persons. His life in politics, serving as County Attorney, Congressman, Senator, and Vice President, made him the subject of many articles in newspapers, magazines, and books. But his childhood is shrouded in mystery and romance, a curious mixture of fact and legend, a story containing many conflicts of opinion and many omissions, a story based in many instances upon the word of Curtis after he had attained an advanced age.

Charles Curtis was born January 25, 1860, near North Topeka, Kansas.<sup>1</sup> According to one account he was born in a log cabin.<sup>2</sup> The location of his birthplace was a farm, an

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<sup>1</sup>James C. Malin, Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), XXII, supplement 2, 136, hereafter cited as DAB; The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography (New York: James T. White & Company, 1917), XIV, 416, hereafter cited as NCAB; The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography (New York: James T. White & Company, 1930), Current vol. C, 7, hereafter cited as NCAB; Don C. Seitz, From Kaw Teepee to Capital: The Life Story of Charles Curtis, Indian, Who Has Risen to High Estate (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1928), p. 20, hereafter cited as Teepee to Capital; Charles Merz, "Preconvention Portraits," The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6; Charles G. Ross, "Charles Curtis of Kansas," The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 83.

<sup>2</sup>Bliss Isely and W. M. Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas (Topeka: The State of Kansas, 1944), p. 337. See also The Topeka State Journal, August 18, 1932, p. 13.



Indian allotment held by his Grandmother, Julie Genville,<sup>3</sup> "being situate[d] upon the South West Quarter of Reserve No. 4 of the Kew Half Breed Indian Lands in Shawnee, County, Kansas."<sup>4</sup> One writer characterized it as an "occasional camping place for Kaws."<sup>5</sup>

He was the only son of Oren A. Curtis and Ellen Peppan.<sup>6</sup> Oren Curtis was of English stock;<sup>7</sup> his family disembarked from the ship Elizabeth at New York in 1631.<sup>8</sup> William Curtis, father of Oren, was born December 22, 1800,

<sup>3</sup>William Allen White, Calvin Coolidge: The Man Who Is President (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), p. 174, hereafter cited as Calvin Coolidge; Isely and Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup>"Abstract of Title, Lot No. 126 on Topeka, Avenue, in Curtis Addition to the City of Topeka," Curtis Collection, Kansas Historical Society. An important document inasmuch as it cites the statutes establishing the Indian allotment and chronicles the transfers of ownership that culminated in ownership of this property by Charles Curtis.

<sup>5</sup>Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6.

<sup>6</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136. Most sources give the name of Curtis's mother as it appears in the text. However, Professor Malin gives it as Papan and Merz gives it as Poppin. Sometimes her given name appears as Helen. Oren Curtis was commonly nicknamed Jack and his given name has appeared as Orren, Orrin, and Orin.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.; Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6.

<sup>8</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, pp. 174-175; NCAB, XIV, 416, sets the date of landing at 1621.



and lived until March 1, 1873.<sup>9</sup> William Curtis had fourteen children, most of whom survived to an advanced age.<sup>10</sup> The wife of William Curtis was born Permelia Hubbard and traced her ancestry through New Hampshire to Massachusetts where the Hubbards had appeared in 1621.<sup>11</sup> William Curtis had always had a desire to relocate in a new country, so he left his New York birthplace, moving westward "when quite a boy." He moved to Kansas from Indiana in 1860, settling in North Topeka when it was but a wilderness.

Oren Curtis was born in Vermillion County, Indiana, June 1, 1829. He married in Indiana in 1848, a marriage that produced two sons, Harvey and John.<sup>12</sup> This first

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<sup>9</sup>The Topeka State Journal, August 18, 1932, p. 13, depicts the monument over the grave of William Curtis in the Curtis family cemetery. This page includes photographs and sketches of Curtis at various stages of his life, of his family, and of several of the houses in which he lived during his life.

<sup>10</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, March 30, 1898, p. 5; Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5; Clyde N. Young and Lamar Middleton, Heirs Apparent: The Vice-Presidents of the United States (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 279, hereafter cited as Heirs Apparent.

<sup>11</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 174.

<sup>12</sup>W. G. Cutler (ed.), History of the State of Kansas (Chicago: A. T. Andress, 1883), p. 559. See also The Topeka Daily Capital, March 30, 1898, p. 5; Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5. Both of the latter accounts list only one son from the first marriage. Cutler includes a biographical sketch of Oren A. Curtis to 1883 and shorter sketches of the lives of William Curtis, Ellen Pappen Curtis, and Charles Curtis. The four sketches appear to contain several subtle contradictions.



marriage to a woman known only as Miss Quick ended in divorce.<sup>13</sup> Oren Curtis moved to Platte County, Illinois, in 1851 where he remained for three years whereupon he returned to Indiana. From Indiana he went to Kansas City, Kansas, arriving on April 1, 1856. He went to work first at Lawrence, then at Leavenworth, Kansas, finally leaving the Territory because his free-state sentiments had caused some pro-slavery advocates to threaten him. He traveled in Missouri and Iowa until he joined the party of Preston B. Plumb.<sup>14</sup> Curtis joined the party at Winterset, Iowa, for Plumb's second trip to Kansas. The group of free-staters made their way to Kansas over the Lane trail, and the "Grizzlies," as they were known, drilled frequently for they expected trouble with pro-slavery sympathizers. Curtis made speeches to the group to keep up their spirits--his poor use of language being partly compensated for by a more than adequate lung capacity. The party arrived at Topeka on September 26, 1856, and when Plumb moved on to hunt a town-site, Curtis remained in Topeka, working at a number of occupations during the next several years. His job for the

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<sup>13</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, March 30, 1898, p. 5; Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559, credits Oren Curtis with holding an almost innumerable series of jobs of a great variety of types.



first six weeks was to help Louis Peppan operate a ferry; he ran ferry again for Peppan for a time in 1857; and in 1858 he went into company with Peppan in operating the ferry again for a time.<sup>15</sup>

Ellen Peppan was of French and Indian descent.<sup>16</sup>

William Allen White outlined her ancestry in these words:

In the early part of the nineteenth century Curtis's great-grandfather, a Frenchman living near St. Louis, married the daughter of White Plume, a Kaw Indian Chief. She was the granddaughter of Chief Pawhuskie, of the Osage tribe. Julie Conville, the daughter of this Indian woman, married Louis Peppan, a French trader near St. Louis in the middle of the nineteenth century and the Peppans moved with the Kaw Indians to their reservation in Kansas.<sup>17</sup>

In 1842 Louis Peppan launched a ferry on the Kansas river on the site of present-day Topeka. Peppan charged

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.; William E. Connelley, The Life of Preston B. Plumb (Chicago: Brown & Howell Company, 1913), pp. 44-51; William E. Connelley, "The Lane Trail," Kansas Historical Collections, 1913-1914, XIII, 274 & 276. See also The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924 and The Kansas City Star, February 8, 1936, Clipping file, William Allen White Library, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, hereafter cited as Clipping file; The Topeka Daily Capital, March 30, 1898, p. 5; Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5; White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 175; The Annals of Kansas, 1886-1925 (2 vols.; Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, [n.d.]), I, 268; Isely and Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas, p. 337.

<sup>16</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

<sup>17</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 164. Similar but less complete accounts appear in Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6; Ross, The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 83; Isely and Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas, p. 107. Isely and Richards give the maiden surname of Julie Peppan as Gonnevillie.



\$1.00 for each wagon carried across the river. Inasmuch as the ferry could make fifty trips per day, carrying two wagons each trip, the business was quite profitable. Oren A. Curtis helped run the ferry after he came to Topeka.

The black-eyed, black-haired daughter of Louis Pappan, Ellen, played games with the Indian children in wild surroundings "where business buildings now line Kansas Avenue, Topeka." Of course, she often used the ferry to cross the river.<sup>18</sup> She attended the Indian school that later became St. Mary's College.<sup>19</sup>

Oren Curtis married the nineteen-year-old Ellen Pappan in February, 1859;<sup>20</sup> she gave birth to Elizabeth Curtis,<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Isely and Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas, pp. 107-108. Mention of the Pappan family and the Pappan ferry are to be found in Governor A. H. Reeder to G. W. Manypenny, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 5, 1855, "Documentary History of Kansas," Kansas Historical Collections, 1889-'96, V, 225; "Reminiscences of Frederick Chouteau," Kansas Historical Collections, 1903-1904, VIII, 482; Jotham Meeker, "High Waters in Kansas," Kansas Historical Collections, 1903-1904, VIII, 478; Louis Charles Laurent, "Reminiscences By the Son of a French Pioneer," Kansas Historical Collections, 1913-1914, XIII, 368.

<sup>19</sup>Isely and Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas, p. 295.

<sup>20</sup>Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559.

<sup>21</sup>Married name Mrs. Rome Colvin; she remained a resident of Topeka, Kansas, throughout the life of Charles Curtis.



as well as the older Charles.<sup>22</sup> Ellen Pappan Curtis died in April, 1863, when Charles was three years old.<sup>23</sup> Curtis married and divorced another wife, possibly within the year 1863.<sup>24</sup> The only name for her in these accounts is the name she acquired through a later remarriage, Mrs. Rachel Hatch.<sup>25</sup>

Oren Curtis raised a company of militia in August, 1863, which he commanded for a short time.<sup>26</sup> In the fall of

<sup>22</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; The Topeka Daily Capital, March 30, 1898, p. 5; Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5. Professor Malin states that Ellen Pappan was the first wife of Oren Curtis. However, the obituaries cited in this entry credit him with having five wives within his lifetime, the last of which was Lou Jay. This writer can identify only four of the wives. Dolly and Charles Curtis seem to have avoided mentioning that their father had five wives. In her memoirs Dolly mentions only Ellen Pappan and Lou Jay.

<sup>23</sup>Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559; Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 176.

<sup>24</sup>Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5; The Topeka Daily Capital, March 30, 1898, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup>Litigation growing out of this marriage occurred as late as the year of Oren Curtis's death. "... suit was brought by Mrs. Hester Small to quiet title to a tract of real estate north of Topeka, which was formerly owned in part interest by Mrs. Rachel Hatch. . . . In 1863, Captain Curtis sold the property in question and his wife refused to sign the deed. . . . Mrs. Hatch therefore set up a claim to an interest in the land, but Judge Hazen held that whatever right she had was forfeited on account of the divorce." The Topeka Daily Capital, March 29, 1898, p. 8; see also Topeka State Journal, March 29, 1898, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup>Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559. Perhaps NCAB, Current vol. C, 7, refers to this when crediting his service as a captain as having been with the Thirteenth Kansas.



1863 the Fifteenth Kansas Cavalry was mustered into Federal service because of the massacre at Lawrence on August 21, 1863. It was to protect the exposed eastern border of Kansas, lest atrocities cause the depopulation of that area.<sup>27</sup> Company F of the Fifteenth was recruited in Shawnee, Jefferson, and Leavenworth Counties, and its officers were Captain O. A. Curtis, First Lieutenant T. J. Bragg, and Second Lieutenant R. F. Bowman.<sup>28</sup> An eyewitness said that when the organization of the company had been completed Captain Curtis formed his men in line on the main street of Indianola, rode out in front of them and announced: "Now, gentlemen, I want you to follow me. Ther's (sic) no place where Jack Curtis dassent (sic) go."<sup>29</sup> The company was mustered into the service at Leavenworth in October, 1863. It performed guard and scout duty at various places in eastern Kansas, as well as being involved in several skirmishes. Company F was part of the force that moved into Missouri in October, 1864, to engage the forces of the

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<sup>27</sup>Official Military History of Kansas Regiments During the War for the Suppression of the Great Rebellion (Leavenworth, Kansas: W. S. Burke, 1870), pp. 382 & 386, hereafter cited as Military History of Kansas. See also Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5; The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.

<sup>28</sup>Military History of Kansas, p. 383.

<sup>29</sup>"Old Indianola," Kansas Historical Collections, 1911-1912, XII, 427.

Confederate General Price. Company F fought in a rearguard action on October 19 and was for a time cut off from the main force which was in retreat. Company F suffered this plight because Captain Curtis had not received new orders as had been promised.<sup>30</sup> Colonel C. R. Jennison later said there were many instances of personal gallantry associated with the retreat. However, his comment upon the fight by Company F to rejoin the force contained this strange statement: "The action of Captain Curtis in cutting his way through and joining his command should entitle him to something better than a cell in the Missouri penitentiary and Zebra pants."<sup>31</sup> The meaning of the "commendation" is not readily apparent. Curtis was discharged in April, 1865.

While on a thirty day leave from his command Curtis married Lou Jay<sup>32</sup> on December 25, 1864, at Olathe, Kansas.<sup>33</sup> She bore him a daughter, Dolly, half-sister of the future Vice President, Charles Curtis.<sup>34</sup> Dolly stated in her

<sup>30</sup>Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559.

<sup>31</sup>Military History of Kansas, pp. 389-390.

<sup>32</sup>Given as Lucy Jays in The Topeka Daily Capital, March 30, 1898, p. 5; Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5. Dolly Gann spelled her mother's name Lou Jay.

<sup>33</sup>Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559.

<sup>34</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; Dolly [Curtis] Gann, Dolly Gann's Book (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1933), p. 3. Professor Malin states that Dolly Gann's Book is a source of both information and misinformation.



memoirs that her mother came from a branch of the John Jay family. Lou Jay's father, Minor Jay, emigrated west from New York to Illinois contrary to the advice of his family. When Minor Jay died, his wife moved her family to Kansas. It was there that her daughter, Lou Jay, married Oren Curtis.<sup>35</sup>

The life of the father of Charles Curtis contrasts with that of his ultimately famous son. Oren Curtis was by nature a rover. At the age of fifty-three years he had traveled through twenty-nine different states and nine territories and boasted that he had never been confined to a sick bed a day in his life. Between November 1868 and April 1869 he was a Quartermaster Sergeant in the Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry which was fighting Indians.<sup>36</sup>

At one time he owned the greater part of North Topeka, but through bad management and improvident habits, he lost everything. At the time of his death he occupied a farm six miles from Newkirk, O. T., which belongs to the children of Congressman Curtis and Mrs. Colvin. Their mother, who was Miss Peppen, was a half breed Indian, and the children are entitled to the property through their Indian blood.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup>Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559. See also James Albert Hadley, "The Nineteenth Kansas Cavalry and the Conquest of the Plains Indians," Kansas Historical Collections, 1907-1908, X, 437.

<sup>37</sup>Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5.

When last heard from before his death he was planning a wagon trip through Arkansas. Yet, he "was known as one of the oldest citizens of Shawnee county," and had been "a familiar figure in Topeka for years." He had moved from Topeka to Newkirk, O. T., only about two years before his death, March 28, 1898.<sup>38</sup> Strangely, in later years it was often said that Oren Curtis died when Charles Curtis was but a small boy, when actually Charles Curtis was thirty-eight years of age in 1898.<sup>39</sup>

Professor Malin credits the grandmother of Charles Curtis, Permelia Hubbard Curtis, with having cared for the boy from the time of his mother's death in 1863 until 1866.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Topeka State Journal, March 30, 1898, p. 5; The Topeka Daily Capital, March 30, 1898, p. 5; The Annals of Kansas, I, 268.

<sup>39</sup>Charles Curtis is quoted as saying: "You see my parents died when I was very young and I was brought up on an Indian reservation by my Grandmother Peppan . . ." S. J. Woolf, "Senate's New Ruler Long a Senator," The New York Times, April 14, 1929, sec. V, p. 7. Consider also this statement by a writer: "His parents were dead. His mother had died when he was a baby and he still was a small boy when death relieved his father of a disease dating from his service as a captain in the Civil War." E. B. Chapman, "Promising Jockey Ruined to Make a Senator," The Dearborn [n.p.] Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.

<sup>40</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6, both mention a two year stay with Permelia Curtis. Other writers usually do not mention these years with Grandmother Curtis. Evidently Curtis himself passed over this when being interviewed by journalists in his later years.



Then he moved to the home of his maternal grandmother, Julie Gonville Pappan, during the years from 1866 to 1869.<sup>41</sup>

Julie Pappan was living with her mother's people on the Kaw reservation sixty miles west of Topeka.<sup>42</sup> Looking back at the age of sixty-nine Curtis said, "Until I was 8 I lived there, happy and contented, playing, riding horses and learning very little."<sup>43</sup> He received the beginning of an education at the mission school, but the horses and dogs seem to have appealed to him more as companions than did books.<sup>44</sup> As a boy Curtis always thought of himself as an Indian. Seitz claims that he had been given a horse called Kate as early as when he was but one year old, that he rode bareback, hanging on to the horse's mane, and that by the time he was three years old he could ride alone at some speed. Even though it would have meant that Curtis was less than three years old at the time, Seitz says that Curtis was taught to swim by his mother who would drop him into the

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<sup>41</sup>Melin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

<sup>42</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 175; Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6; Ross, The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 83.

<sup>43</sup>Woolf, The New York Times, April 14, 1929, sec. V, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup>Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6; Thomas P. Doran, "Kansas Sixty Years Ago," Kansas Historical Collections, 1919-1922, XV, 491.

Kansas river to splash around for himself.<sup>45</sup> To say the least, the boy was thoroughly familiar with life in the open at a very early age.

But in 1869 Charles Curtis left the reservation, returning to Grandmother Curtis in Topeka.<sup>46</sup> Throughout his life he never tired of telling of the heroic circumstances under which he left the reservation.<sup>47</sup> In that year the Cheyennes raided the Kaws. Curtis himself related the details of the raid:

. . . . I was down by the creek with some other boys when the Kaws who were going out to meet the Cheyennes went by and they asked me to carry the news to my grandparents and others up the creek which I did.

We all gathered in the old barn at the Agency and I was in the barn until the raid was over. After the raid was over, it was suggested that some one should go to Topeka and inform the people on the way and there, about the Cheyennes as the Kaws in the old barn did not know what the Cheyennes intended doing, so as soon as the raid was over, I left for Topeka. I traveled all night and reached Topeka the next day.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, pp. 18-19.

<sup>46</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 176, places the date at 1868.

<sup>47</sup>For example, when appearing in Council Grove to deliver a political address in 1930, he abandoned his prepared speech and reminisced about boyhood experiences on the reservation, especially about his run to Topeka. The New York Times, October 25, 1930, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup>Letter from Curtis to Brigham, "Old Kaw Indian Mission," State museum, Council Grove, Kansas. Curtis wrote the account of the raid in order to correct an error in



Curtis is quoted in another account thusly:

... We wanted to appeal to the white man, and I could speak English. I was lithe and active, and, young as I was, the chief of the tribe thought I could be intrusted with the important message. I ran and walked for miles, summoning help for the besieged tribe.

I at last got to Topeka, where relatives of my father lived, and I decided to stay with them for a while. . . .<sup>49</sup>

From that time until he struck out on his own, Charles Curtis lived with his paternal grandmother. But he once came very close to returning to life on a reservation. The Kaws, who had numbered 1,700 in 1850, were on the verge of starvation at their Council Grove reservation and noticeably decreasing in numbers in the latter part of the 1860's. It was decided to remove the Kaw tribe to Oklahoma Indian Territory.<sup>50</sup> Five hundred and thirty-three Kaws left the

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Lella Meloy Brigham, The Story of Council Grove on the Santa Fe Trail (Published by the author, 1921), p. 39, hereafter cited as Council Grove. Curtis took exception to the statement inferring that he ran away from the reservation when he heard the raid was impending.

<sup>49</sup>Woolf, The New York Times, April 14, 1929, sec. V, p. 7. Cutler, A History of the State of Kansas, p. 800, gives a general account of the raid. George P. Morehouse, "History of the Kansa (sic) or Kaw Indians," Kansas Historical Collections, 1907-1908, X, 358-361, includes an account of the raid, a slightly different version of Curtis's cross-country run, and a general treatment of life on the Kaw Indian reservation at Council Grove.

<sup>50</sup>Berlin B. Chapman, "Charles Curtis and the Kaw Reservation," The Kansas Historical Quarterly, XV (November, 1947), 338. On February 14, 1873 Congress appropriated

Council Grove reservation June 4, 1874, arriving in Indian Territory June 21 without loss of life or trouble with whites.<sup>51</sup> In the fall of 1874 a number of the Kaw tribe, Curtis's Grandfather and Grandmother Pappan included, visited friends on the Pottawatomie reservation. On the return trip they camped for a time at Topeka. The men in the party convinced Curtis that he should go with them to the reservation in Oklahoma Indian Territory.<sup>52</sup> Curtis later said, "the longing for the old life took possession of me. . . . I wanted to go back to the customs of my childhood, and so I joined the tribe once more."<sup>53</sup> However, the illness of one of the women halted the group at Six Mile Creek south of Topeka for several days. On the day prior to their planned departure the men rode back to spend the day in Topeka. Grandmother Pappan called Curtis to her wagon.

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\$25,000 to provide for the removal and most urgent necessities of the tribe, said funds to be reimbursed by sale of the lands the Kaws were leaving.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.; Brigham, Council Grove, p. 51 places the time of departure in May, 1873. Her figures on tribal numbers are not easily reconciled with those of Professor Chapman, but this may arise over distinctions between "full-bloods" and "half-breeds."

<sup>52</sup>Isely and Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas, p. 51. The authors quote a letter from Curtis covering this entire incident.

<sup>53</sup>Woolf, The New York Times, April 14, 1929, sec. V, p. 7.



She was alone. After hearing his reasons for wanting to return to reservation life, she told him that, despite her own desire to have him with her, he would be wise to return to Topeka and continue his education. She had the foresight to predict that his best interest would not be served by a return to the life of carefree riding and of avoiding schooling. When the tribe left next morning, Curtis packed his belongings in a flour sack and rode north toward Topeka.<sup>54</sup> A fourteen-year-old boy had made a decision that meant the difference between possibly being a life-long dependent of the government or of ultimately holding the second highest office in that government.

Curtis had begun his common school education in Topeka in 1869, and, when he had decided not to go to Indian territory, he continued his education during the winters, finishing common school in 1875.<sup>55</sup> Grandmother Curtis "had

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<sup>54</sup>Isely and Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas, p. 51. Again Curtis is not completely consistent. In relating this story in Woolf, The New York Times, April 14, 1929, sec. V, p. 7, Curtis says: "After we had left Topeka my grandmother called me to her tent. I can still see the burning log fire, the vast plains and the bright moon overhead." Therefore, one account suggests it was daytime, the other that it was evening. White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 176, relates a similar but briefer account of this incident. He suggests that Curtis joined the "hegira" and that, when Curtis turned back, he walked.

<sup>55</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; see also Seitz, Tecpee to Capital, p. 141; White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 176.

no money to spare;<sup>56</sup> consequently, it was necessary that he work during the time that he lived with her. Many odd-job occupations have been credited to Curtis, but it cannot be said with any certainty at exactly which ages he held each. Curtis himself said that he had sold fruit on trains.<sup>57</sup> Isely and Richards wrote that he was a newsboy.<sup>58</sup> Another sketch mentions that he sold papers and peanuts at the races and county fairs.<sup>59</sup> One of his early jobs, however, brought him early fame.

During the years of his common schooling, Curtis began to ride as a jockey during the summer racing seasons.<sup>60</sup> He was particularly well-qualified to be a jockey, because he was light of weight, and his early training on the reservation, especially his early knowledge of horses, was a second essential element in the formula for success on the track.<sup>61</sup> Ross recorded the early racing days in these words:

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<sup>56</sup>Woolf, The New York Times, April 14, 1929, sec. V, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup>Woolf, The New York Times, April 14, 1929, sec. V, p. 7; see also Ross, The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 83.

<sup>58</sup>Isely and Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas, p. 337.

<sup>59</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 279.

<sup>60</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

<sup>61</sup>Woolf, The New York Times, April 14, 1929, sec. V, p. 7.



Before he was nine he became a jockey. He must have been a good one, for the owner of Tilden, a famous Kansas horse of those days, gave him a regular job. He toured the Southwest with Tilden, meeting all comers and never losing a race. The racing of that period was a haphazard but none the less serious business. Meets were arranged at any convenient place to bring together the fancied horses of rival owners or communities, and the stakes ran high. Curtis recalls that at a race down in Texas the man for whom he was riding called him over for final instructions. The owner was seated with a rifle across his knees. 'Son,' he said, 'the last dollar I have in the world is on this race. If you don't win, don't stop when you cross the finish line. Keep right on going.' Curtis won.<sup>62</sup>

The regular employer of Curtis paid the boy jockey \$50.00 per month and ten per cent of the winnings. This was a great amount of money for the time, yet the fact that Curtis managed to save something from his earnings made him somewhat of a rarity among jockeys.<sup>63</sup>

The year after Curtis left common school, like the year 1874, proved to be a time of important decision. He was sixteen years of age and under contract to ride in the coming winter.<sup>64</sup> Apparently he had decided not to go to high school; however, before he could fulfill the winter contract he abandoned the life of a jockey. There are two common stories of how he came to leave racing and there is

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<sup>62</sup>Ross, The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 83.

<sup>63</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.; White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 176.

reason to support both.<sup>65</sup> The most common story, one that Curtis himself approved, was that on a visit to Grandmother Permella Curtis, the aged lady pleaded with him to stop riding race horses and return to school.<sup>66</sup> He told one reporter that he ended his race track associations within a week to return to his books.<sup>67</sup> Another very plausible reason for his decision was his increasing weight.<sup>68</sup> A boy who was destined to be a large man might very well have been becoming too heavy to ride in professional competition at the age of sixteen. One source recounts a tale of Curtis going to his employer to see if he could get his riding contract rescinded. Not only did the employer allow him to end the contract, but he gave Curtis \$50.00 to use in furthering

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<sup>65</sup>However, the account by E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file, does contain one aspect that is difficult to justify. He claims that Curtis's grandfather pointed out to Curtis that he was becoming too heavy to be a jockey and should return to school. Grandfather Curtis died in 1873, while the incident in question occurred in 1876. Therefore, unless Grandfather Pappan was off the reservation and at whatever place Curtis was racing at the time, it is unlikely that Curtis received such advice from a grandfather.

<sup>66</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 176; Ross, The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 83; The Kansas City Star, February 8, 1936, Clipping file.

<sup>67</sup>Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6.

<sup>68</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 278; E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.



his education and another \$50.00 came at Christmas during the first year of high school.<sup>69</sup>

Throughout his life Curtis credited his grandmothers with having had a profound influence upon his life. Professor Malin emphasizes this, saying that a proper understanding of Curtis would have to include an appreciation for the influence of several women in his life--his grandmothers, his wife, and his half-sister, Dolly Curtis Gann.<sup>70</sup> Two instances when a grandmother guided him to a decision of fateful importance have been discussed. But more should be said about Grandmother Curtis. The fact that Curtis spent his school years with her, the years that must have been highly formative in terms of the man who was to emerge later, makes the evaluation of her Grandmother by Dolly Gann all the more significant.

In my childhood the outstanding influence, the most important fact, was my Grandmother Curtis. She ruled the family. So strong in mind and body, yet so gentle, she brooked no opposition. Not that any of us wished to oppose her; if we strayed momentarily, by accident or inadvertence, from the fold of her orthodoxy, she needed only to remind us of our allegiance, which lasted to her death at the age of ninety-six years . . .<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.

<sup>70</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

<sup>71</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 1.

This meant that Permellie Curtis had the opportunity to influence her Grandson, Charles, until he was forty-three years of age, for Grandmother Curtis died in 1903.<sup>72</sup> The "orthodoxy" referred to was the fact that she was both a Methodist and an ardent Republican. "I think she regarded being both a Methodist and a Republican as essential for anyone who expected to go to heaven."<sup>73</sup> Dolly put more emphasis on Republicanism than upon Methodism, and this, coupled with other experiences in his life, may help explain the life-time party regularity of Charles Curtis. This regard for Permellie Curtis's "orthodoxy" appears again in Dolly's comment upon her own marriage to E. E. Gann some time after the death of Grandmother Curtis: "I had married not only a Democrat, but an office-holding Democrat! That was an adventure for a Kansas Republican of the Curtis clan. I wonder what Grandmother would have thought of it!"<sup>74</sup>

Curtis entered high school in September, 1876.<sup>75</sup> It has been said that he was a good student. He graduated in 1879, and was chosen for the honor of being class

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<sup>72</sup>Dolly seems certain of this date because she associates the death of her grandmother with the "big flood" of 1903.

<sup>73</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>75</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.



orator.<sup>76</sup> Some time in his late teens Curtis became a hack driver to support himself while studying. One writer gave this colorful version:

. . . . The financial going was rough, and he was tempted more than once to return to the track. Finally he hit upon a way to make money. A livery-stable keeper of his acquaintance had an unused hack and a spavined horse. Curtis owned a horse equally spavined. He rented the outfit from the stable, added his own animal, and set up as a hack proprietor. Success became assured when the politicians who frequented the old Copeland House in Topeka took a fancy to Curtis's disreputable-looking rig and began to patronize it to the exclusion of others. . . .<sup>77</sup>

Curtis made all the trains from late afternoon until midnight. He divided his receipts with the livery. His share of the profits were enough to keep him in school. He managed to study between trips, as well as at home and at school. He attended school in the mornings and early afternoons.<sup>78</sup> Curtis became a "leg man" for the Topeka Times, bringing in items he happened to pick up while driving hack.<sup>79</sup> White said it was the duty of Curtis to solicit subscribers, as well as to gather news.<sup>80</sup> But just as

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<sup>76</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, pp. 279-280.

<sup>77</sup>Ross, The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 83-84.

<sup>78</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9. Clipping file. See also White, Calvin Coolidge, pp. 176-177; Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6.

<sup>79</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 279.

<sup>80</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 177.

important to Curtis as his unflagging study, first in high school, then of the law while driving the cab, were his contacts with politicians who rode his hack. He came to know and he made friends with men well-known by the public.<sup>81</sup>

At the age of eighteen he had the rights of majority conferred upon himself by the Shawnee County District Court so he could transact his own business.<sup>82</sup>

In 1879, at the age of nineteen and not long out of high school, Charles Curtis decided on a law career.<sup>83</sup> One of the men of local fame that Curtis had met was A. H. Case.<sup>84</sup> Case was one of the two or three more respected lawyers in the Topeka area. He had known Curtis from his days as a jockey. Case had established the practice of riding in Curtis's shabby cab upon his return from a journey to some trial in another town. Some time after graduation from high

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<sup>81</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.

<sup>82</sup>Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559.

<sup>83</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

<sup>84</sup>There is disagreement over his surname. It appears as Case in NCAB, XIV, 416; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, pp. 150-151; E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file; Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6. It appears as Cess in NCAB, Current vol. C, 7. It appears as Chase in Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 280. Only one account relates a given name, "Alfred," NCAB, Current vol. C, 7. The nickname "Hib" is given in Chapman.



school Curtis approached Case, asking him for an opportunity to study law. Chapman alone recorded that the older man tried to discourage the nineteen-year-old youngster, because of the notoriously poor circumstances of the too-abundant lawyers of Topeka. Curtis stood firm in his conviction. Case agreed to allow Curtis access to his law library; in return, Curtis would combine the duties of office boy and janitor in Case's office.<sup>85</sup> After two months of study he assisted Case in court for the first time, and after six months he was handling petty cases for the firm. He also became the firm's bill collector.<sup>86</sup> After two years of study Curtis took the bar examination and was admitted to the practice of law--the year was 1881 and he was twenty-one years of age.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Cutler, The History of the State of Kansas, p. 559. E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file. See also Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 151. Some accounts give the impression that Curtis continued to drive hack while studying law. For example, Merz, The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6: "It is said that visitors to Topeka in the late 'seventies might have hailed a cab and drawn as a driver an alert young man who carried Blackstone on the box beside him. At any rate, most of Curtis' study of the law seems to have been done at the railway stations."

<sup>86</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file. See also Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 151.

<sup>87</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 151; Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 280; E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file; NCAB, Current vol. C, 7; White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 178.

Curtis made criminal law his special field in practice.<sup>88</sup> For a time he was a partner of A. H. Case.<sup>89</sup> Seitz claimed that Curtis received an interest to the extent of one-third of Case's receipts. And it was also Seitz who recorded that Curtis's reputation sprung from clearing a farmer charged with murder.<sup>90</sup> "Ambitious to use his own name," Curtis left the office of his preceptor to form a partnership with David Overmeyer.<sup>91</sup> Upon the completion of Curtis's second term as prosecuting attorney in 1889, the firm of Curtis and Overmeyer was one of the most prosperous in Topeka.<sup>92</sup> Shortly after his retirement from the prosecutor's office Curtis entered another partnership, this time with Henry Safford under the firm name of Curtis and Safford. Their firm was successful from the first.<sup>93</sup> Throughout his life Curtis maintained law offices in Topeka.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

<sup>89</sup>Cutler, History of the State of Kansas, p. 559 dates the formation of the partnership August 9, 1881; Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 280 and Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 151 both infer that this partnership was of shorter duration than the three years stated in NCAB, Current vol. C, 7.

<sup>90</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 151. See also The New York Times, February 9, 1936, p. 32.

<sup>91</sup>The New York Times, February 9, 1936, p. 32. See also Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 280.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 155.

<sup>94</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 280.



At the age of twenty-four and in the same year that he was elected county attorney, Curtis became a party to a more enduring partnership. On Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1884,<sup>95</sup> he married Miss Anne E. Baird.<sup>96</sup> She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John M. Baird of Topeka, and was born December 24, 1860. The family had come to Topeka from Altoona, Pennsylvania, in 1869.<sup>97</sup> According to one account the couple met while attending high school.<sup>98</sup> During their forty-odd years of marriage, Anna gave birth to three children: Harry King Curtis,<sup>99</sup> Permelia (Mrs. C. P. George, wife of a career army officer), and Leona (Mrs. Webster Knight, II, wife of a wealthy industrialist of Providence,

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<sup>95</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 151 and Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 280 take the year 1881. All other sources agree on 1884.

<sup>96</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; The Topeka Daily Capital, June 21, 1924, p. 1. Her name appears as "Annie" in NCAB, XIV, 416; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 151; Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 280. One of many cases where Seitz, and Young and Middleton agree in the minority, suggesting that perhaps a principal source for the later Heirs Apparent was the campaign biography by Seitz.

<sup>97</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, June 21, 1924, p. 1; The Topeka State Journal, June 20, 1924, p. 1. The New York Times, June 21, 1924, p. 13, states she left Altoona at the age of seven.

<sup>98</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 280.

<sup>99</sup>Berlin B. Chapman, The Kansas Historical Quarterly, XV (November, 1947), p. 351, footnote, placed the death of Harry at May 29, 1946.

Rhode Island).<sup>100</sup> Anna died at the age of sixty-three on June 29, 1924, while Curtis was a Senator. She had been an invalid for the last two years of her life, and hope for her recovery had been abandoned months before she died.<sup>101</sup>

In a twenty-four year period a young man who had begun life as an Indian had, through hard work, the wisdom of his grandmothers, and probably simple good fortune, gained an education, entered a profession successfully, and established a family that was to be his pride and comfort in the years to come. He was soon to turn his profession into a stepping stone on the climb to national fame.

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<sup>100</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

<sup>101</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, June 21, 1924, p. 1; The Topeka State Journal, June 20, 1924, p. 1. See also The New York Times, June 21, 1924, p. 13.



## CHAPTER III

### CURTIS ENTERS POLITICAL LIFE

Curtis did not waste time in utilizing his political contacts of hack-driving days, nor did he hesitate to expend this beginning. His name had become known when he rode race horses, and he came to know politicians as a cab driver. He widened this acquaintance by appearing in justice court; he even added to his friendships when collecting bills.<sup>1</sup> Curtis went straight from the triumph of admittance to the bar into politics<sup>2</sup> as well as into private law practice. His first direct participation in politics was to join a Republican club. A common form of political demonstration in those days was the procession, and Curtis joined the marchers. He put his complete interest in politics to work, not as an orator, but as a listener. He knew how his precinct would go in a given balloting. Soon he had similar knowledge of his ward and then of the entire city of Topeka. To do this he followed the pattern that was to become so familiar: he

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<sup>1</sup>E. B. Chapman, "Promising Jockey Ruined to Make a Senator," The Dearborn [n.p.] Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file, William Allen White Library, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, hereafter cited as Clipping file.

<sup>2</sup>William Allen White, Calvin Coolidge: The Man Who Is President (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), p. 178, hereafter cited as Calvin Coolidge.

worked hard, talked little, listened much, and made permanent friends. He made it a point to make the acquaintance of everyone possible. Thus he early developed in basic form the political techniques that were to form the rungs of his political ladder.<sup>3</sup>

E. B. Chapman records that Curtis's decision to seek office in 1884 was connected to assuming a pivotal role and to a surprisingly precocious political performance at a county convention:

Curtis was a delegate in the county convention in 1884, the year of the Blaine fight. He was the youngest delegate and was expected, along with most of the other delegates, to do as he was told. But Curtis, sure of his ground because of his perfect knowledge of conditions, jumped into the fight for Blaine. He wasn't an orator but when he concluded his speech that afternoon the convention instructed its delegates for Blaine.

. . . . Curtis didn't upset the program at the convention without making enemies--and friends. On the advice of the later (sic) he decided to make the race for county attorney. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The political issue of the day was prohibition. In 1879 the legislature of Kansas had submitted to the voters a constitutional amendment that read: "The manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors shall be forever prohibited in this state, except for medical, scientific, and mechanical

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<sup>3</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



purposes." The amendment was approved.<sup>5</sup> In 1881 the legislature implemented the amendment with an enforcement act.<sup>6</sup> Seitz claimed that prohibition came about because "the shooting, drinking cowboys had become a curse and the older and better half of the state determined to stamp out the liquor traffic."<sup>7</sup> Regardless of motives for passing the law, it was not easily enforced. In Shawnee County alone there existed some hundred-odd saloons and kindred establishments in 1884.<sup>8</sup> The liquor interests hoped for repeal. "Curtis's firm was retained by them at the rate of \$500 a month, whether there were cases to try or not."

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<sup>5</sup>State of Kansas, Session Laws of 1879, Chapter CLXV, p. 293; Constitution of the State of Kansas and Amendments and Proposed Amendments Submitted (Topeka: State Printer, 1946), Art. 15, Sec. 10. The prohibition amendment remained a part of the Kansas Constitution until resubmitted to the voters of Kansas by the Kansas Legislature, State of Kansas, Session Laws of 1947, Chapter 240, p. 382. The voters ratified the amendment ending prohibition in the election of 1948. John D. Bright (ed.), Kansas: The First Century (5 vols.; New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1956), II, 475-476.

<sup>6</sup>State of Kansas, Session Laws of 1881, Chapter CXXVIII, pp. 233-244.

<sup>7</sup>Don C. Seitz, From Kaw Teepee to Capital: The Life Story of Charles Curtis, Indian, Who Has Risen to High Estate (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1928), p. 153, hereafter cited as Teepee to Capital.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.; "Heep Big Chief," American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 410.

Curtis had let his sympathy toward resubmission become known. The "wet" politicians assumed that he was safe.<sup>9</sup>

The "good folk" of Topeka grumbled about lax enforcement of prohibition, and in 1884 the threat of a reform ticket was in the air.<sup>10</sup> Curtis was considered a competent lawyer despite his mere three years of practice.<sup>11</sup> "The local bosses and saloon-keepers, casting about for a safe candidate who would at the same time mollify the respectable element, hit upon the youthful and ambitious Charley."<sup>12</sup> The saloon element which dominated local politics saw in Curtis "a friend at court." Curtis made the usual promises to enforce the law strictly. "Don't get me wrong," he told his backers, "if I am elected I will enforce every law, and some of you may regret it." This standard campaign announcement seems to have been more the cause of amusement than of concern to the liquor element.<sup>13</sup>

The campaign for county attorney was a bitter fight. The prohibitionists had lined up five of the leading lawyers

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<sup>9</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.

<sup>10</sup>American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 410.

<sup>11</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 153.

<sup>12</sup>American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 410.

<sup>13</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 153.



of the community to work for the defeat of Curtis and the election of the prohibition candidate. In what was to become a familiar Curtis manner, he personally contacted virtually every voter; however, his opponents did also. His political adversaries made issues of the jockey and cab-driver background and his relatively short experience as a lawyer, as well as his known advocacy of resubmission.<sup>14</sup> His opponents had every reason to believe the worst about Curtis; especially were they certain that his election would not bring the more stringent enforcement of prohibition that was their main demand. The voters chose Curtis,<sup>15</sup> and launched him upon a career of office-holding that was to be virtually his sole employment for life.<sup>16</sup>

The previous prosecutors had established the fine system whereby the saloon-keepers would be brought into court every month or so. They would plead guilty on one count of illegally vending liquor, pay the minimum \$100

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<sup>14</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Des Moines Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.

<sup>15</sup>In view of the vote-attracting talents of Curtis, his election cannot be viewed with any certainty as a mandate for lax prohibition enforcement in Shawnee County. This is particularly true because he surely included in his personal appeals a statement of his intention to enforce all laws--a statement which might attract both parties.

<sup>16</sup>James C. Malin, Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), XXII, supplement 2, 136.

fine, and return to their business.<sup>17</sup> The saloon-keepers found this to be a most satisfactory arrangement in view of the possible penalties under the Kansas prohibition enforcement law. The State law required that saloons be closed as common nuisances. The penalty for the convicted sellers of liquor was to be a fine of from \$100 to \$500 and/or a jail sentence of from 60 days to 90 days.<sup>18</sup> When Curtis took office in January, he was confronted with one hundred indictments left over from the previous term. There were eighty places in Shawnee County that had taken out federal liquor licenses.<sup>19</sup> Obviously Curtis had secured election to a position where an aspiring young politician could make his mark. Furthermore, the Republican party had committed itself to prohibition as early as 1862;<sup>20</sup> consequently, the policy soon to be adopted by Curtis--already a regular Republican committed to machine politics--was not too strange. It was

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<sup>17</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.

<sup>18</sup>State of Kansas, Session Laws of 1881, Chapter CXXVIII, p. 241. The fact that liquor could be sold for medicinal purposes prompted the comment that "the number of sickly Kansans increased remarkably." William Frank Zornow, Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 192.

<sup>19</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.

<sup>20</sup>Zornow, Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State, p. 192.



entirely in character for Curtis to support wholeheartedly a stand made by his party that was contrary to his personal convictions.<sup>21</sup>

Curtis immediately brought one of the left-over cases to trial. He allowed half of the jury members chosen to be drinkers. He appealed to them, however, by pointing out that he did not favor the prohibition law himself, but that he was sworn to enforce the law, not to judge its merits. Inasmuch as jury members were duty-bound as sworn officers of the court to similarly uphold the law, he told them he expected a conviction. Regardless of the line of reasoning followed by the jury, they responded with a verdict of guilty.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> . . . . And the surprising part of it is that Curtis, the resubmissionist, never took a drink.

'I had no high-flown moral principles against drinking,' he said, 'but I had seen loafers and beggars who had been good husbands and fathers. I saw how liquor broke down men, took away their pride, made wrecks of them. I let it alone.'" E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file. Throughout his life Curtis was noted for abstinence from the use of either liquor or tobacco. See also Seitz, Teetotal Capital, pp. 154-155.

<sup>22</sup> E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file. There is an obvious incongruity in these accounts. If the saloon-keepers usually pled guilty and paid a minimum fine, and if they further expected Curtis to continue to allow this, why was this case contested? It is possible, of course, that Curtis purposefully selected a case that would be contested. One account, Charles G. Ross, "Charles Curtis of Kansas," The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 84, states that, when Curtis obtained the initial conviction, the remaining defendants pled guilty and threw themselves upon the mercy of the court.

But it was another aspect of Curtis's handling of the one hundred grand-jury indictments that shocked the so-called liberals who had recently supported his election.

On the first conviction after he was elected the liberals were literally bowled over by the man they had supported for county attorney. Curtis insisted that the court impose a jail sentence in addition to the fine.

'That is tresson,' the liberals shouted.

'That is the law,' Curtis replied, 'and so long as the law stands I shall insist upon its being enforced to the letter.'<sup>23</sup>

Curtis enjoyed a great deal of success as county attorney. He obtained convictions in all but five of the 108 criminal cases he prosecuted during his first term.<sup>24</sup> During his subsequent second term he obtained convictions in all the criminal cases he prosecuted. He was able to convict in virtually all of the liquor cases he brought to trial.<sup>25</sup> Within thirty days of assuming office there was not an open saloon in Shawnee County and by the end of his first term, Curtis had made Topeka come much closer to being

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<sup>23</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.

<sup>24</sup>Oswald Garrison Villard, Prophets True and False (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), p. 153; Seltz, Teesee to Capital, p. 154.

<sup>25</sup>E. B. Chapman, The Dearborn Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.



in fact the "dry" town that it was by law.<sup>26</sup> He had closed eighty-eight saloons in the first thirty days.<sup>27</sup>

In 1886 Curtis was reelected, backed this time by the forces that had opposed his first candidacy. His only serious opposition came from the joint-keepers he had jailed. His record of law enforcement in Topeka, and his youth and courage, had brought statewide recognition.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.

<sup>27</sup>Villard, Prophets True and False, p. 153; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 154.

<sup>28</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONGRESSMAN CURTIS

Curtis returned to the practice of criminal law upon the expiration of his second term as county attorney in 1889. He was almost twenty-nine years of age and had an assured practice. His clients kept him busy so he was earning a substantial income.<sup>1</sup>

He had grown in political stature during the decade of the 1880's for reasons besides his performance as county attorney. Curtis was a "hand-shaker" and a "palaverer." He possessed a political personality that drew men to his support and held them. He remembered the names of men and women all over his home county.<sup>2</sup> He was affectionately known as "Our Charley" by his friends in North Topeka.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, "as he rose in Kansas politics, his more favored enemies upon whom he bestowed from time to time the bitter benediction of defeat, referred to him as 'the Injun,' or being sarcastic, 'the Noble Red Man of the Forest,' or,

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<sup>1</sup>William Allen White, Calvin Coolidge: The Man Who Is President (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), p. 179, hereafter cited as Calvin Coolidge.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 178.



for short, 'Lo'!<sup>4</sup> The next step for Curtis was to try for the Congressional nomination.

In the years immediately after 1889 Curtis kept busy with politics. It seems certain that he had his ambition purposefully aimed at the congressional nomination. He was active as a speaker throughout the Fourth Congressional District.<sup>5</sup> Each fall he campaigned for the Republican party. And just as he always had during the 1880's, he appeared at city and county conventions and political gatherings prepared to name from memory hundreds of farmers whom he had met in the past and had remembered.<sup>6</sup>

William Allen White described the Curtis of those days thusly:

He was a handsome youth--slight, with the jockey's litheness, with affectionate, black, caressing eyes that were hard to forget; with a fine, olive skin, and a haystack of black hair and a curling black mustache. Add to that a gentle, ingratiating voice, and an easy flow of innocuous conversation unimpeded by pestiferous ideas and you have a creature God-sent into politics.<sup>7</sup>

In 1891 Curtis first met William Allen White--then a resident of Eldorado, Kansas--a young newspaperman who later

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

was to voice his factional opposition to Curtis through editorial comments in his Emporia Gazette. Writing in later years when his opposition to Curtis had lessened, White recalled the event:

That year, well into the summer, I first met a young prince whose life was to be linked with mine fairly closely for more than two score years. He was Charley Curtis. He came down from Topeka to campaign the county, sent by the Republican state central committee. His job was to fight the Farmers' Alliance. He had a rabble-rousing speech with a good deal of Civil War in it, a lot of protective tariff, and a very carefully poised stredle on the currency question (which, I was satisfied then--and still think--that he knew little about, and cared absolutely nothing for). For his politics were always purely personal. Issues never bothered him. . . .

Butler County is larger than the state of Rhode Island, and he and I, with a buggy hired by the county Republican committee, rode over the county together for three days. He made the speeches; I introduced him. A glee club went with us and sang ribald doggerel, lambasting the Farmers' Alliance.

. . . I felt that he was a wonder with his winning ways. I never saw a man who could go into a hostile audience, smile, shake hands, and talk before and after the meeting so plausibly that what he said on his feet as an orator was completely eclipsed as a human being. . . .

As early as 1889 Curtis made a bid for the Republican nomination for Representative from the Fourth Congressional District. A special election was prompted by the resignation of Representative Thomas Ryan who had been appointed

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<sup>8</sup>William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), pp. 196-197.



Minister to Mexico. Kansas had a county convention system, and Curtis was one of several candidates from Shawnee County, each of whom was asking that the delegates to the District convention be instructed for himself. The youngest of these candidates was Curtis who got into the final round of balloting, but lost by one vote, 38 to 37. He attributed his defeat to betrayal by one of his own delegates and he poured his wrath upon that delegate before the entire convention. And in the same breath, party regular that he was, he pledged to support the successful candidate. Harrison Kelley of Osage County was nominated by the Republican party at the District convention and went on to carry the election and served the short term in the House of Representatives.<sup>9</sup>

In the regular Congressional election of 1890 Curtis would not make the race. Possibly he anticipated the fact that the Farmers' Alliance candidate was going to be victorious.<sup>10</sup> One can only speculate as to whether a Curtis candidacy might have tipped the scale in favor of the Republicans.

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<sup>9</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file, William Allen White Library, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, hereafter cited as Clipping file.

<sup>10</sup>Klyde N. Young and Lamar Middleton, Heirs Apparent: The Vice-Presidents of the United States (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), pp. 280-281, hereafter cited as Heirs Apparent.

It was in 1892 that Curtis was elected to the House of Representatives where he was to remain until 1907.<sup>11</sup> The Republicans nominated him at the Fourth District convention which was held in the opera house at Emporia.<sup>12</sup> Actually Curtis obtained the nomination by default; the nomination was being shunned by Republicans for they were skeptical of the chances of their party that year. After all, John G. Otis, a Populist and a farmer, had won the Fourth District election in 1890.<sup>13</sup> There was sound reasoning behind Republican pessimism. In the year 1892 Kansas gave its electoral vote to Weaver who attracted much of the normal Republican vote, and the presidency went to Grover Cleveland, a Democrat.<sup>14</sup> A majority of the Congressmen elected in Kansas that year were Populists, as was the governor and the state slate.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>James C. Malin, Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), XXII, supplement 2, 136, hereafter cited as DAB; The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography (New York: James T. White & Company, 1930), Current vol. C, 7, hereafter cited as NCAB.

<sup>12</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 179.

<sup>13</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file. See also Don C. Seitz, From Kew Teepee to Capital: The Life Story of Charles Curtis, Indian, Who Has Risen to High Estate (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1928), p. 159, hereafter cited as Teepee to Capital.

<sup>14</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 281.

<sup>15</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.



Curtis made the race against the "milkman" put forward by the Populists, and his own party knew he would be defeated. But Curtis put his political assets to work in conjunction with his usual vast expenditure of hand-shaking energy. "His enemies made the mistake of stressing his Indian blood in ignominy." At each of his campaign stops people came specifically to see the Indian. They saw a charming politician who was actually more a dashing young Frenchman in appearance than he was an Indian. "The little, fat, bald-headed milkman with a stubby chin whisker and a Holy Cause had no show even in a Democratic year against 'Our Charley'."<sup>16</sup> Curtis reportedly made stops at farm houses to shake hands and make friends with the farm families. He became personally acquainted with as many of the voters in the Fourth District as he could possibly meet.<sup>17</sup> It was that year that he began his geographic file of voters in his district. He made a list for each township, placing on it the carefully memorized names of voters and, at the same time, associating names and faces. It was of tremendous value for a politician to be able to add a personal touch to a letter or to be able to call voters of a given township by

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<sup>16</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 180.

<sup>17</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.

name when campaigning there.<sup>18</sup> In 1896 White had the opportunity to witness Curtis using this technique as he accompanied the politician to a little town outside Emporia.

Another thing I remember about Curtis on that trip: a mile or two before we got to Plymouth, he pulled out a little book on which were the names of the Republicans of Pike Township, surrounding Plymouth, and like a pious worshiper out of a prayer book he began mumbling their names to impress them on his memory. It was a curious rite, I thought, and I giggled. But it was dead serious to Curtis. He had a little book like that for every township in Kansas, and carried the county's Republican poll list when he went into a county. In that way he survived politically for forty years. No matter what the issue was, it did not concern him. He knew that if he could call a man's name in a crowd, shake hands with him and ask him about his wife and children, whose names were also in the little book, he had that man's vote. Whether Curtis was for free silver or the protective tariff, the railroad regulations or what not, the voter was hypnotized by the fact that the Congressman knew him as an old friend.<sup>19</sup>

In the election of 1892 Curtis turned an adverse majority of four thousand in 1890 into a favorable majority of twenty-five hundred votes and became the Representative of the Fourth Congressional District of Kansas in the 53rd Congress.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 180.

<sup>19</sup>White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 304.

<sup>20</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.



The labor Curtis invested in the 1892 election paid large dividends. His grasp on the District became seemingly complete. In 1894 his constituents sent him back to Washington to serve in the 54th Congress. They paid him a similar tribute in 1896.<sup>21</sup> Curtis was the object of some admiration in Washington during his early years in Congress because it was the era of Populist revolt and Western Republicans were rare in Washington.<sup>22</sup> White contended that Curtis was able to win re-election time after time because of the exercise of mental power:

For it takes brains, and brains of just as high an order, to remember ten thousand names and faces in a district, with something about each name and face to distinguish it from all the others, as it does to remember tariff schedules or the relation between the price of wheat and pig iron or bar silver in a given month for a half century.<sup>23</sup>

The Populists were anxious to end the tenure of Curtis in Congress. For several years they had harbored the belief that reapportionment would help accomplish that end, but they had lacked the opportunity. However, in 1897, due in part to a Republican split over free silver in the previous campaign, the Populists controlled both houses of the legislature. They believed that they could control every

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<sup>21</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 163.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 159-160.

<sup>23</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, pp. 180-181.

congressional district except the strongly Republican First, if Shawnee, possibly the strongest Republican county in the state, could be moved into the First District. Inasmuch as the First District had gone to a Republican, Case Broderick, in the last election, and since he would be entitled by tradition to party support for reelection, the gerrymander would have the added benefit to Populism of spelling the political doom of Congressman Curtis.<sup>24</sup> The legislature voted to move Shawnee County--Curtis's home county--into the First District in 1897.<sup>25</sup> During all the years that Populism was rampant throughout the agricultural West, with Kansas one of the states at the very heart of the agrarian discontent, Curtis remained a regular Republican.<sup>26</sup> His reward was the gerrymander, but he did not bow to Populism, and he did not retire from the political arena.

As the congressional election of 1898 approached, it seemed highly unlikely that Curtis could secure the Republican

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<sup>24</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file; W. P. Harrington, "The Populist Party in Kansas," Kansas Historical Collections, 1923-1925, XVI, 446.

<sup>25</sup>State of Kansas, Session Laws of 1897, Chapter XC, pp. 181-182. Under this act the Counties of Pottawatomie, Waubesaunsee, Osage, Lyon, Coffey, Woodson, Greenwood, Butler, Chase, Marion, and Morris constituted the Fourth District. The First District included, in addition to its new member Shawnee County, Nemaha, Brown, Doniphan, Jackson, Atchison, Jefferson, and Leavenworth Counties.

<sup>26</sup>NCAB, Current vol. C, 7.



nomination in his new district. He knew Shawnee County intimately, but he was unfamiliar with the remainder of the First District. Furthermore, the incumbent, Case Broderick, had no intention of retiring. And Cy Leland, a real power in the First District, was grooming Willis J. Bailey, Nemaha County banker and farmer, for the nomination.

Curtis prepared for the convention in his characteristic way. Before the Republicans met at Horton, he went out through the district, shaking hands, making friends, devoting particular attention to the farmers. Curtis could not control a majority at the convention, but he had acquired a block of supporters and had established a legitimate claim to the nomination.<sup>27</sup>

The convention at Horton was thrown into a three-way deadlock between Curtis, Broderick, and Bailey. The contest continued through 701 ballots before the impasse was ended.<sup>28</sup> Finally Leland turned the delegates committed to Bailey over to Curtis who was then nominated.<sup>29</sup> However, Leland had not capitulated completely, a highly unrealistic course to expect of the political boss of the First District.

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<sup>27</sup>The Kansas City Star, February 8, 1936, Clipping file.

<sup>28</sup>John D. Bright (ed.), Kansas: The First Century (5 vols.; New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1956), II, 10.

<sup>29</sup>The Kansas City Star, February 8, 1936, Clipping file.

An agreement had been reached that was to be the source of later contention. The Leland group later claimed that the agreement was written, and that it was signed by D. A. Mulvane and Judge Albert H. Horton for Curtis and by Leland and an associate for the Curtis opposition. The terms of the agreement were that Curtis would be given the nomination in 1898; in return, he would retire to support the Leland candidate, W. J. Bailey, in 1900. It was never ascertained whether Curtis gave his consent to the so-called Horton agreement.<sup>30</sup> However, he was not given to being a political pawn. In view of the years he had been in politics by 1898, it is difficult to visualize Curtis as naive and simple to the extent of not understanding Leland's sudden support. Curtis carried the election and joined the Kansas delegation to the 56th Congress as Representative from the First District.<sup>31</sup>

In 1900 Bailey was prepared to claim the First District nomination as provided in the Horton agreement.<sup>32</sup> Curtis refused to honor the pledge and announced his candidacy for reelection. Bailey announced his candidacy also. The campaign that followed engrossed much of Kansas. It was

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<sup>30</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.

<sup>31</sup>NCAB, Current vol. C, 7. See also Seitz, Tepee to Capital, pp. 164-165; Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 281.

<sup>32</sup>Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 10.



to leave an imprint on Kansas politics for years to come. Bailey made the Horton agreement a campaign issue. Curtis made his usual hand-shaking tour of the District.<sup>33</sup> He won the nomination and made some long-lasting enemies. In the years to follow there were two factions, the Leland faction and the Curtis faction, in the First District, a schism that remained in evidence ten years later, even though Curtis and Leland had reconciled their differences before that much time had elapsed.<sup>34</sup> Curtis was able to secure the nomination, according to one account, because of his hold on patronage.<sup>35</sup>

After the bitter nomination fight in 1900 Curtis was easily elected, and each year thereafter until his appointment to the Senate in 1907 he easily obtained the nomination and election as Representative of the First District.<sup>36</sup> He was elected to serve in the 58th (1902), 59th (1904), and 60th (1906) Congresses. He never served as a Representative in the 60th Congress for he had been elected to the United

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<sup>33</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.

<sup>34</sup>The Kansas City Star, February 8, 1936, Clipping file.

<sup>35</sup>Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 10.

<sup>36</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file.

States Senate, January 23, 1907, and he was sworn in on January 29, the same day he had resigned his seat in the House of Representatives.<sup>37</sup>

As Representative of the First District Curtis seems to have marshalled wide support just as he had in the Fourth District.<sup>38</sup> He did not maintain such popularity by demonstrating a talent for profound thinking. William Allen White's views have been seen. Even the campaign biography of Curtis holds that his principal strengths were in the nature of practical politics; Curtis won the support of constituents by getting things done, by maintaining close personal ties with constituents, and by promoting the personal interests of individuals in Kansas regardless of their party affiliation in previous elections.<sup>39</sup> Curtis put his half-sister Dolly Curtis in charge of his correspondence which received immediate attention. Particular care was given to pension requests. And his file on constituents was considered by many to be the most complete ever compiled. His mastery of human relations was the basis for his

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<sup>37</sup>The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography (New York: James T. White & Company, 1917), XIV, 416, hereafter cited as NCAE.

<sup>38</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 281.

<sup>39</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 163.



continued successes at the polls. His success cannot be attributed to sponsorship of astute legislative measures.<sup>40</sup>

Curtis seldom wrote bills or made speeches in Congress, but through personal conference he contributed in a major fashion to the molding of the legislation of his era; his brand is upon much of the law that bears other men's names.<sup>41</sup>

Yet to Kansans Curtis was a great man for he knew them by their first names and answered their letters. He once received 1400 letters in one day and answered most of them within the day with the aid of Dolly Curtis, two or three secretaries, and several farm letters.<sup>42</sup>

Curtis gained more than the usual amount of attention accorded a freshman Representative because of his Indian blood. He caught the fancy of Thomas B. Reed, Speaker of the House.<sup>43</sup> Speaker Reed addressed Curtis as "Indian."<sup>44</sup> A persistent Curtis legend hinges upon the relation of Curtis and Reed. It was reported that Curtis entered Reed's office unannounced one day only to discover a group of Representatives gathered there to frame a gold standard act. Reed insisted

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<sup>40</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Oswald Garrison Villard, Prophets True and False (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), p. 15.

<sup>43</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, pp. 160-161.

<sup>44</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 279.

that Curtis remain and sit in on the discussion. It was soon apparent that the group could not agree. Finally, Reed turned to Curtis and asked the "Indian" what he would do. Curtis was not a currency expert, but he knew how to get things done. He suggested that the matter be taken from the hands of the caucus of leaders and be given instead to a select committee. Some time later Reed appointed just such a committee and included Curtis among its eleven members. This committee framed the Gold Standard Act of 1900.<sup>45</sup>

Generally, every source, including Curtis's critics, credit him with having had a significant part in shaping legislation during his tenure in Congress. However, he was noted as a fixer and a whisperer; he was not noted for authoring bills. Hence, it is difficult to determine exactly which bills he influenced or to assess the weight of his influence in each case.<sup>46</sup> One of the more complete lists was compiled by Arthur Capper, Curtis's senatorial colleague from Kansas after 1918.<sup>47</sup> Obviously Capper was

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<sup>45</sup>Charles G. Ross, "Charles Curtis of Kansas," The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 12; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 161; "Heap Big Chief," American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 411; NCAB, XIV, 416.

<sup>46</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, p. 136; American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 410-411.

<sup>47</sup>William Frank Zornow, Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), pp. 235 ff.



interested in emphasizing for Kansans what his fellow Republican, Curtis, had meant in terms of gain for the State. He credited the following to Representative Curtis:

During his first years in Congress he introduced bills to further restrict immigration; to settle labor disputes by arbitration; and to amend the Interstate Commerce act so as to prohibit railroads from granting rebates to and discriminating against shippers and places. These policies have long since been enacted into law. He suggested the plan that resulted in the drawing and enactment of the gold standard laws of 1900 and was a member of the committee which prepared the bill.

At the request of Speaker Reed, he made the fight alone on the bill to continue jurisdiction in the United States court at Paris, Texas and Fort Smith, Arkansas, over crimes committed in the old Indian Territory, thereby enabling the government to prosecute the cases in the Indian Territory which saved the government \$600,000 a year for a period of ten years.<sup>48</sup>

His two amendments made it possible for the Free Home bill to be enacted.<sup>49</sup>

He was author of the Curtis Act (1898) which was aimed at protecting the Indians. By the provisions of the act the Indians of Indian Territory were given the right to

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<sup>48</sup>Arthur Capper, "Some Benefits Senator Curtis Has Procured for Kansas and Kansans," The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B. One account credits Capper with having been Curtis's first campaign manager; claiming that it was Capper who first induced Curtis to run for office. The New York Times, February 9, 1936, p. 32.

<sup>49</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B.

incorporate towns and elect their own town officials.<sup>50</sup> This act provided that the land and money of the Five Civilized Nations be allotted in severalty. For 97,000 Indians this was the act which wound up communal affairs.<sup>51</sup> It was proposed by the Appropriations committee in 1898 that the number of United States Forts be reduced; furthermore they decided that one of the forts to be eliminated should be either Fort Riley or Fort Leavenworth of Kansas. The testimony of Curtis before the committee was followed by a committee decision to maintain both of the Kansas forts.<sup>52</sup>

Curtis fostered an amendment to the Chippewa Indian Timber Act (1899) which saved the government \$15,000,000. "He opposed the claims of the Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians for the so-called leased district, involving more than 7,000,000 acres of land valued at \$1.25 an acre."<sup>53</sup> Through the efforts of Curtis the more than 8,000 acres of the Fort Hays Military reservation was turned to the State of Kansas for use as a western branch by Kansas State Agricultural

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<sup>50</sup>NCAB, Current vol. C, 7.

<sup>51</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 164.

<sup>52</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B; NCAB, Current vol. C, 7.

<sup>53</sup>NCAB, Current vol. C, 7; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 164, sets the figure at \$16,000,000.



College.<sup>54</sup> Curtis made a special trip to Washington when word was received that the 23rd Kansas was to be mustered out. He influenced McKinley to send the regiment to Cuba instead. Curtis also had a voice in getting the 20th Kansas sent to the Philippines.<sup>55</sup> As would be expected of a Congressman from Kansas, Curtis backed legislation for rural delivery of the mail.<sup>56</sup> One source lists several other minor Curtis triumphs. He presided over the House during a visit to the United States by Prince Henry of Prussia. Curtis was a member of a party headed by Taft that went to the Philippines in 1905; he was also a member of a party visiting Panama and South America in 1907.<sup>57</sup> Curtis played an important role in defeating the attempt to pass legislation that would have funded the debt of the Union Pacific Railroad for fifty years. Consequently, the railroad instead paid the United States treasury the sum of \$126,000,000.

While in the House of Representatives Curtis was a member of three standing committees, Ways and Means, Indian

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<sup>54</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B; NCAB, Current vol. C, 7.

<sup>55</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B.

<sup>56</sup>NCAB, Current vol. C, 7.

<sup>57</sup>NCAB, XIV, 416.

Affairs, and Public Lands. His most prominent committee role was played in reference to Indian Affairs, where he worked indefatigably, not only for the Kaw tribe, but for the rights of Indians in general. For example, it was his interest in Indian affairs that made it possible to prevent a land grant by a railroad in Oklahoma. "He remained unalterably opposed to removing further restrictions from governmental care and supervision of Indian affairs and has always been a warm champion of the Indians' welfare."<sup>58</sup>

While Curtis was a member of the powerful Ways and Means Committee, he was far from the chairmanship when he left the House of Representatives. In 1907 he stood eleventh from the top of that committee. However, by that time he had become a party whip.<sup>59</sup>

It is somewhat easier to assess in an abstract way the values held by Curtis as Representative from Kansas. Probably the most astute observer of Kansas politics at the time was William Allen White. He claimed that only once did Curtis take a stand on an issue in such a way that he could be identified with it.<sup>60</sup> According to White's account

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<sup>58</sup>NCAB, Current vol. C, 7; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, pp. 163-164.

<sup>59</sup>Charles Merz, "Preconvention Portraits," The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 7.

<sup>60</sup>White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 304.



Curtis took a stand for the free coinage of silver in the year 1896:

In the meantime the campaign of 1896 was opening. Mr. Lelsnd was selecting the delegates to the national convention from Kansas, instructed for William McKinley for President. I did not care for McKinley. I supported Thomas Reed, who was Speaker of the House and had declared emphatically and unmistakably for the gold standard. McKinley, even during the campaign, was silent on the currency question. Mark Hanna, who had taken charge of the national campaign for him, was more interested in his candidate than he was in his platform; but, being an industrialist rather than a banker, he would have made the campaign on the tariff. Our Kansas statesmen were all for the tariff because it gave them a chance to take the wind out of the sails of the fiat money Democrats and Populists by advocating the free coinage of silver, an inflationary proposal. The young Kansas congressman from our district, my friend of Butler County days, Charley Curtis, was an advocate of free silver. I remember his breezing into Emporia that spring--straight, slim, with a certain virile grace that came from a lithe and supple figure. He wore a blue suit and a straw hat and a loosely tied bow tie, and was too handsome for words. He shook hands up and down Commercial Street and had everyone for free silver before the national Republican convention.<sup>61</sup>

White also commented upon the stand taken by Curtis during the Spanish-American War. He said that Curtis, like most Congressmen, waved the flag and talked about the oppression of the Cubans without being in the least aware of the deeper currents of imperialism that were involved. White said that the casual treatment given the issues of the Spanish-American War resulted from the fact that the cry

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

for a "free Cuba" was a vote-getter--Curtis was interested first and foremost in votes.<sup>62</sup> Curtis was the darling of the Grand Army of the Republic who could champion him and call him "Our Charley" because his father had been a Civil War veteran and because Curtis was prompt in getting at pension requests. His assessment of the role played by Curtis in the big issues of the day led White to comment: "Thus statesmen are made and wax strong through the years in our democracy. And, strange as it may seem, the Republic stands. God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 304.



## CHAPTER V

### SENATOR CURTIS

Just as Curtis was not successful in his first campaign for election to the House of Representatives, his first bid for a Senate seat was also unsuccessful. In 1903 Curtis was a candidate for the Republican senatorial election. The election of Senators at this time was a constitutional prerogative of state legislatures. The Kansas Legislature was, as it had been almost continuously since the end of the Civil War, controlled by the Republican party. The crucial point, therefore, was the Republican nomination. It had become a custom of the Republicans to choose their nominee in the party caucus. The caucus was complicated by the fact that the nominees to be presented for the offices of speaker of the house and state printer rarely sought the nomination on their own; they would combine with one of the senatorial aspirants to form a faction.<sup>1</sup>

In 1903 there was a Curtis faction and an anti-Curtis faction, the latter being in the majority and consisting of a coalition of friends of Chester I. Long and of Governor William E. Stanley. To be successful Curtis would have had

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<sup>1</sup>William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), pp. 350-351.

to split that coalition.<sup>2</sup> The following is a record of the balloting through two caucus sessions:

Stanley	37	-	36	-	36	-	32	-	29	-	29
Curtis	35	-	35	-	35	-	35	-	36	-	36
Long	35	-	35	-	36	-	40	-	44	-	44
Calderhead	13	-	14	-	13	-	12	-	12	-	12
Bowersock	9	-	9	-	9	-	8	-	6	-	6
(Necessary:	65)										

The deadlock was obvious; it was just as obvious that one of the top three contenders would have to capitulate. On the next ballot Stanley threw his votes to "his fellow Wichitan" and, consequently, both the nomination and the subsequent election of Long was assured. Furthermore, the next senatorial election was generally conceded to have been settled at the same time.<sup>3</sup> To understand the political situation out of which such a predetermined election could arise one must understand the nature of railroad influence upon state politics early in the twentieth century. The railroads exerted this influence in the State through their attorneys who were able to implement this power through the generous distribution of railroad passes to legislators and members of their families and even to their friends in the case of powerful legislators. These attorneys had considerable authority to negotiate on their own in a given political

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>3</sup>John D. Bright (ed.), Kansas: The First Century (5 vols.; New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1956), II, 12.



situation, but ultimately they answered to owners and managers in St. Louis, Chicago, and New York. In 1903 the railroads were generally luke-warm in backing a particular candidate all the way, but it was known that the Rock Island leaned toward Curtis, the Santa Fe toward Long, and the Missouri Pacific was initially divided. This division in the Missouri Pacific stand was in terms of part of that railroad's representatives being pro-Curtis and part being anti-Curtis. The anti-Curtis element was nominally committed to Stanley, but when the pro-Curtis element moved to the other faction, it went to the support of Long. William Allen White claimed that this decision was made in St. Louis. Furthermore, he charged that a bargain had been struck whereby Long was to receive the nomination in 1903 and, in return, Curtis was to receive the nomination in the following Kansas senatorial campaign.<sup>4</sup> Of course, such manipulations on the part of state legislatures gave impetus to the demands for the direct election of Senators.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, pp. 351-352.

<sup>5</sup>Consequently, it might also be said that Curtis's biographer oversimplified the election of Curtis to the Senate: "So well had Curtis served his district in Congress that when Senator J. R. Burton resigned his seat in 1907 he became the choice of the Kansas Legislature both to fill out the latter's unexpired term and for the six years to follow." Don C. Seitz, From Kaw Tteepee to Capital: The Life Story of Charles Curtis, Indian, Who Has Risen to High Estate (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1928), p. 165, hereafter cited as Tteepee to Capital.

The year 1906 was marked by much contention among possible candidates for the senatorial election scheduled to be held when the legislature convened in 1907. William Allen White greeted the candidacy of Curtis by calling for a candidate who was not connected with machine politics to come forward. 'Everyone knows,' White declared, 'that Curtis is a professional politician without an ideal and without any breadth of view, and that he is ignorant of the great world outside of politics.'<sup>6</sup> Additional interest in the campaign resulted from the resignation of the incumbent before the expiration of his term. Joseph R. Burton, who had been elected in 1901, resigned June 7, 1906, when he lost his last appeal on a conviction for violation of a federal statute. Kansas had really had only one Senator since April 7, 1904, for Burton had not participated in the Senate since the date when the original indictment was brought against him.<sup>7</sup> The Legislature was not in session; therefore, it was the responsibility of Governor Edward W. Hoch to make the ad interim appointment. He passed over the candidates who were already seeking election by the Legislature, choosing instead Alfred W. Benson, after Foster Dwight

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<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Walter Johnson, William Allen White's America (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), p. 156.

<sup>7</sup>Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 13.



Coburn, the Kansas State Secretary of Agriculture, had declined the appointment.<sup>8</sup>

When the Legislature met in January of 1907 there were a number of candidates. In addition to Curtis, W. R. Stubbs, Joseph L. Bristow, P. P. Campbell, Victor Murdock, and Dan Anthony were seeking the Republican nomination. Furthermore, Benson was quite eager to return to Washington.<sup>9</sup> The political air was further clouded by a popular clamour against "railroad Senators" because the visit of Robert LaFollette during the preceding campaign had aroused a lot of hitherto apathetic persons to an awareness of railroad domination in politics. William Allen White, Henry J. Allen, Stubbs, and Bristow, all went to Topeka specifically to defeat Curtis. They tied the label of railroad Senator to him, and advanced Bristow as the candidate of the progressive Republican faction. White gave the following advice to Theodore Roosevelt while the fight was in progress:

Here in Kansas I find every single general attorney of every railroad in the State, and every single newspaper that has ever been suspected of railroad alignment, solidly tied up with the Senatorial candidacy of Charles Curtis . . . anything you can do to keep

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas Amory Lee, "Alfred Washburn Benson, LL.D.," Kansas Historical Collections, 1915-1918, XIV, 17-18.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.; White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 366.

hands off the Kansas fight, merely occupying a seat at the ringside, will be most heartily appreciated.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the bargain of four years previously, it took five ballots for Curtis to overcome the formidable list of opponents.<sup>11</sup> The progressive faction had no difficulty explaining his success. White said the railroads had "cleaned us up in short order."<sup>12</sup> Curtis was elected for the remainder of Burton's term, and for the regular term following.<sup>13</sup> It has been said that Curtis was the first native of Kansas to serve in the Senate.<sup>14</sup> He took his seat in the Senate January 29, 1907, having secured election on January 23. His first committee assignment was to the Committee on the University of the United States, a group that had no work to do and never met.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Johnson, William Allen White's America, p. 161. Ironically, it was Curtis who introduced White to Roosevelt, "the man, who more than any other in my twenties, thirties, and forties, dominated my life." White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 297.

<sup>11</sup>Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 12-13.

<sup>12</sup>White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 366.

<sup>13</sup>James C. Malin, Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), XXII, supplement 2, 136, hereafter cited as DAB; The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography (New York: James T. White & Company, 1930), Current vol. C, 7, hereafter cited as NCAB, is in error, stating that Curtis went to the Senate in 1896.

<sup>14</sup>The New York Times, February 9, 1936, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup>Charles Merz, "Preconvention Portraits," The Independent, CXV (January 7, 1928), 7.



In 1912 Curtis was a candidate to succeed himself. However, he ran afoul the Bull Moose split in the Republican party. Of course, he remained a regular Republican, untainted by progressivism. Curtis encountered another unique political situation. In 1909 Kansas had established the preferential primary whereby the legislators were to be bound to the party candidate receiving the highest number of votes in the majority of state legislative districts.<sup>16</sup> The progressive faction of William Allen White advocated W. R. Stubbs for the Republican nomination.<sup>17</sup> Curtis received a 1,200 vote plurality in the primary election, but Stubbs carried 99 of the 165 legislative districts. Curiously, the Democratic nominee also won without having secured the greatest number of popular votes. Due to the split in the Republican party the Democrats controlled the Legislature and put their candidate, William H. Thompson, in the Senate. Bright credits much of this to the voting of Curtis adherents, enough of whom "knifed and scratched" to defeat Stubbs.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 47, footnote.

<sup>17</sup>White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 448; The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file, William Allen White Library, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, hereafter cited as Clipping file.

<sup>18</sup>Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 34; NCAB, Current vol. C, 7. Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 168, is in error, stating that Progressive Joseph L. Bristow was elected to the Senate in 1912. Bristow was elected in 1909 at the expiration of Long's term.

Curtis had to endure considerable political abuse because of his refusal to honor progressivism with his support. In 1909 William Allen White attacked the "The Triple Alliance," that is the discredited Burton machine that had fallen under the control of Curtis, Long, and Leland. White characterized this as "The Alliance of Greed and Grab."<sup>19</sup> In 1910 The Topeka Daily Capital, Curtis's hometown newspaper, criticized the Senator in a mild way and chided him for his support of Dan Wagstaff who was running against the progressive Stubbs for the gubernatorial nomination. Curtis immediately made a statement that revealed where he stood on progressivism in general:

'Before leaving Washington I had an interview with Mr. Taft. He was well satisfied with the work that had been done by the late Congress and expressed himself as being confident that the Republican party would continue in the next Congress the same as it has this year. I did not see Mr. Roosevelt while East, but that was probably because I did not ask for an invitation as others have done.'<sup>20</sup>

Several days later Curtis read the progressives out of the party, saying that in the past insurgents had 'had the stamina or manliness to get out of the party they chose to fight.' He repledged himself as a party regular and

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<sup>19</sup>Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 13.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Ibid., II, 37-38.



'decidedly proud of the fact.'<sup>21</sup> However, by 1914, Curtis was able to make the party split work to his advantage. By that time the progressive movement was dying in Kansas, and Curtis made the fight against progressive Bristow who was seeking reelection.

Bristow chose to run under the Republican banner instead of that of a third party. William Allen White urged a third-party candidacy by Bristow because a victory by the Republicans would automatically mean machine control regardless of the candidate chosen by the people at the primary. Furthermore, he warned Bristow that he would be defeated by Curtis.<sup>22</sup> Enough progressives agreed with White and left the Republican party to defeat Bristow in the primary.<sup>23</sup> In 1914 the general election of Senators had been taken away from the legislatures by the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. Curtis defeated the Democratic candidate, George A. Neeley, by a margin of 180,823 to 176,929. The progressive candidate, Victor

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<sup>21</sup>Quoted in Ibid., II, 37-38.

<sup>22</sup>Johnson, William Allen White's America, pp. 220-221.

<sup>23</sup>The Kansas City Star, December 7, 1924, Clipping file; Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 13.

Murdock, polled 116,755 votes.<sup>24</sup> After his victory in 1914 Curtis maintained a secure hold on his Senate seat, winning reelection rather easily thereafter.

In the election of 1920 Kansas gave its full support to the nationalist reaction and search for the old "normalcy." The Republican party swept the election on both the state and the national levels. Curtis handily eliminated the Democratic candidate for the Senate, George H. Hodges, by a vote of 327,072 to 170,443.<sup>25</sup> Some observers could hardly believe that Curtis was a candidate for the election was markedly peaceful. There was no faction out specifically "to get Curtis."<sup>26</sup> The election of 1926 was similarly a lackadaisical contest. Even his old factional enemy, William Allen White, came to the support of Curtis, although not without reservations. White had decided that to advance a progressive ticket again was futile. 'My opinion is not changed about Curtis,' he told a confidant, 'but the whole trend of public opinion in Kansas, in the country, and in

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<sup>24</sup>William Frank Zornow, Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), p. 223. See also Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 34; NCAB, Current vol. C, 7; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 168.

<sup>25</sup>Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 72.

<sup>26</sup>E. B. Chapman, "Promising Jockey Ruined to Make a Senator," The Dearborn [n.p.] Independent, July 29, 1922, p. 9, Clipping file.



the world has changed. They don't want progressives . . . The country is in a Coolidge mind, and it is no time to waste our breath to get them out of it. I shall support Curtis because he is the best of the reactionary crowd.<sup>27</sup> White announced the Gazette would support Curtis 'without retracting a single word it ever said about him.' The Leavenworth Times observed mirthfully that White was in effect retracting 'whole sentences and paragraphs.' White replied that he had often taken Curtis to task as the servant of the wealthy interests, but that he could honestly support Curtis because of the honesty and integrity of Curtis as a person. Curtis was easily reelected as the Republicans again swept most of the contests in Kansas on both the state and local levels.<sup>28</sup>

Curtis served continuously in the Senate between January 29, 1907 and March 4, 1929, except for the two years between March 3, 1913 and March 4, 1915. It is important that some evaluation of his role as a Senator and his contributions be made because: (1) by the end of his Senate career he was perhaps the most powerful man in that assembly; (2) at the end of his senatorial career Curtis made a bid for the Republican presidential nomination, presumably on

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<sup>27</sup>Johnson, William Allen White's America, p. 395.

<sup>28</sup>Zornow, Kansas: A History of the Jayhawk State, p. 241.

the basis of his record in the Senate, and was rewarded by his party with the nomination for Vice President. Furthermore, it is proper to evaluate the legislative career of Curtis at the end of his actual participation as a law-maker, because his record as Vice President was of quite another nature.

In the Senate, as in the House of Representatives, the contribution made by Curtis in many instances is quite ambiguous. It is said that certain bills and certain programs owed a large part of their success to the efforts of Curtis; however, it was again a matter of Curtis the "fixer" and not Curtis the orator that made this true.

He received unusual notice immediately after his being sworn in as a Senator in 1907. The Indian appropriation bill was up before the Senate. This bill had been sent over from the House of Representatives where Curtis had had an instrumental part in shaping it. Within three days of taking the oath he was on the floor of the Senate fighting amendments to the bill that he believed to be inimical to the best interests of the Indians.<sup>29</sup> Also during his first term he was selected to assist Republican floor leader,

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<sup>29</sup>The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography  
(New York: James T. White & Company, 1917), XIV, 416.



W. Murray Crane of Massachusetts, because of the latter's delicate health.<sup>30</sup>

In remaining free of insurgency Curtis supported President William Howard Taft's policies, which were generally considered to be conservative by the so-called progressive insurgents. After 1909 the insurgent element in Kansas was represented by Joseph L. Bristow who was of the William Allen White stamp.<sup>31</sup> But Taft saw fit to listen to Curtis, not Bristow, as White was led to admit disgustedly in the following:

With Roosevelt gone, Taft had no restraining influence. He made a definite break with the progressive leaders. In matters of patronage, he recognized the conservative senators, where a Republican insurgent senator had to be rebuked. Senator Bristow of Kansas was set aside, and Senator Curtis was the President's Kansas mouthpiece.<sup>32</sup>

Toward the end of his first term Curtis was even honored by being made President pro tempore of the Senate for the period December 4-12, 1911.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, pp. 170-171.

<sup>31</sup>NCAE, Current vol. C, 7. However the label of Populist which this account gives to Bristow is of doubtful validity in reference to the year 1909.

<sup>32</sup>White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 425.

<sup>33</sup>Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949 (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1950), p. 1045; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 168.

When Curtis returned in 1915 from his two-year vacation he was chosen by a Republican caucus of Senators to serve as party whip under Henry Cabot Lodge, who had succeeded Crane as Republican floor leader upon Crane's death. Curtis was noted for his indefatigable efforts to rally the party to a show of strength on each issue.<sup>34</sup> As was to be expected, Curtis opposed President Woodrow Wilson's domestic policies;<sup>35</sup> Curtis also opposed Wilson's Mexican policy of "watchful waiting" and opposed the sending of an American punitive expedition to Mexico to suppress border banditry.<sup>36</sup> On February 1, 1916, audiences listened respectfully as Wilson spoke several times in Topeka in behalf of "preparedness." On February 4, Curtis introduced a petition in the United States Senate; it was signed by 11,000 Kansans who stood opposed to the President's plan. At the same time he told an interviewer that he did not believe that war was imminent.<sup>37</sup> In the election of that year Curtis was an active campaigner for Charles Evans Hughes which, of course,

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<sup>34</sup>NCAAB, Current vol. C, 7. See also Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 171.

<sup>35</sup>Klyde N. Young and Lemar Middleton, Heirs Apparent: The Vice-Presidents of the United States (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 281, hereafter cited as Heirs Apparent.

<sup>36</sup>NCAAB, Current vol. C, 7.

<sup>37</sup>Bright, Kansas: The First Century, II, 52.



was to no avail.<sup>38</sup> When war came, Curtis and Kansans in general supported the war, pre-war pacificistic tendencies notwithstanding. Of course, as Henry Cabot Lodge's assistant floor leader, Curtis just as staunchly opposed Wilson's League of Nations.<sup>39</sup>

Curtis, a man of few words, was an early advocate of limited debate in the Senate. In 1917 he and his like-minded colleagues secured the passage of a cloture rule which made it possible to end some filibusters. It was upon a motion made by Curtis that Senate rules were altered to prohibit conferees from legislating for the entire Senate; henceforth, Senate members serving on a conference committee could not promise that compromises made in committee would be adopted automatically. Curtis was always proud of this contribution which Lodge called the most important change in Senate rules up to that time.<sup>40</sup> Curtis also remained just as staunch a supporter of limited debate throughout his career in the Senate. One of the last times that he made news as Senator was in proposing in open Senate session that

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<sup>38</sup>NCAB, Current vol. C, 7.

<sup>39</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, pp. 281-282. See also Charles G. Ross, "Charles Curtis of Kansas," The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 84.

<sup>40</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, pp. 174-175; Ross, The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 84.

debate on a naval armaments bill be limited; his motion was adopted.<sup>41</sup>

Curtis was one of the first legislators on the national level to take up the advocacy of women's rights. Of course, it was at first a notoriously unpopular cause among his fellow Senators. He granted the use of his name and frank to the national organization seeking the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment. When the Amendment was considered in the Senate he made a forthright stand in favor of its adoption. After the adoption of the Amendment in 1919 Curtis twice introduced an amendment proposed by the National Women's party which was intended to do away with legal inequalities to which women were subject in many states. He sponsored a bill to protect American women who married foreigners. He introduced a bill that was to provide better accommodations for women in Federal prisons.<sup>42</sup>

At the 1920 Republican national convention Curtis played a part in one of the more notorious political episodes in American history. After the second day of the deadlock between Leonard Wood and Frank O. Lowden, four men dined together in a suite of the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago.

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<sup>41</sup>The New York Times, January 30, 1929, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, pp. 177-178. See also Ross, The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 84.



The four were Curtis, Senator Frank Brandegee of Connecticut, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, and George Harvey.<sup>43</sup> After dinner this group agreed that the deadlock was hopeless, and discussed compromise candidates.

Of the four, Curtis was the most confident they had best take Harding. Energetic and competent, Curtis started out to call on state leaders and arrange to have delegates vote for Harding in the morning, so that Harding should be the one to have the first 'pick-up.' The others remained in Harvey's suite. From time to time during the night, Curtis came back to the room; he brought other leaders with him; yet other leaders dropping in.<sup>44</sup>

While it is probably impossible to say that the infamous meeting in the "smoke-filled room" that followed was able independently of the will of the convention to pick a presidential candidate, it can be safely said that to the degree to which this group was able to influence the nomination of Harding, Curtis shared in the very decision and served faithfully on party errands in an effort to effect the will of the group.<sup>45</sup> On Saturday morning Kansas led the stampede

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<sup>43</sup>Mark Sullivan, Our Times: The United States, 1900-1925 (6 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), VI, 59, hereafter cited as Our Times; William Allen White, A Puritan in Babylon: The Story of Calvin Coolidge (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 206, hereafter cited as A Puritan in Babylon.

<sup>44</sup>Sullivan, Our Times, VI, 61.

<sup>45</sup>There are various interpretations as to the weight the decision in the "Smoke-filled room" had upon the convention. The extreme corrupt bargain approach is taken by

to Harding on the ninth ballot. White recorded his reaction to the instructions from Curtis thusly:

. . . . Kansas was more or less pledged to Wood, and we voted generally as a unit for Wood. Saturday morning, the morning of what was to be the last day of the convention, Senator Curtis came to the Kansas delegation and told us frankly that it had been decided (the phrase was his) to give Harding a play, after trying for a ballot or two to name Wood. The delegation was for the most part glad enough to take orders. I sat in the meeting of the delegation in our hotel that morning, and when the Curtis orders came, I blew off. I cried:

'If you nominate Harding, you will disgrace the Republican party. You will bring shame to your country.'<sup>46</sup>

Schriftgiesser characterized Curtis as far less able than the others in the group of four that started the meeting the

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Karl Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1948), pp. 7, 12, & 14, of which mention the role of Curtis. A more plausible account is presented by Wesley M. Bagley, "The 'Smoke Filled Room' and the Nomination of Warren G. Harding," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLI (March, 1955), 657-674. Bagley attributes the choice of Harding to a number of inter-related causes, one of which was the notorious meeting. See also White, A Puritan in Babylon, pp. 197-212; Samuel Hopkins Adams, Incredible Era (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), pp. 135 & 152; White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 586; Dolly [Curtis] Gann, Dolly Gann's Book (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1933), pp. 56-58. Gann states that her account came straight from "brother." Her account generally agrees with that of Sullivan.

<sup>46</sup>White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, p. 586. White, A Puritan in Babylon, p. 210, states Curtis controlled the Kansas delegation and the conservative Republican leadership of the Senate controlled Curtis.



evening before the fateful Saturday. In itself that is not startling, but his accusation that Curtis "was a close friend of Sinclair and Doheny, the oil promoters, and a crony of Senator Albert B. Fall" is open to question and not mentioned in other common accounts.<sup>47</sup> The relationship may well have existed but the insinuation that Curtis was linked in any way with later oil scandals is misleading. Curtis was never seriously accused of connection with the scandals of the Harding administration.

Later Curtis commented upon Harding's attitude toward the nomination:

'I was on the train with Mr. and Mrs. Harding (together with Speaker and Mrs. Nicholas Longworth, future Justice of the Supreme Court George H. Sutherland, and Senator Frank Brandegee) when they went from Washington to the convention at Chicago; Harding said he had no show for the nomination, was extremely reluctant to be in it; said he felt like withdrawing even if his withdrawal left Daugherty out on a limb.'<sup>48</sup>

While Curtis was not involved in the Harding scandals, he also kept his peace when these began to come to light; he was not the type to disturb the tranquility of the party by pressing for investigation. The nearest recorded connection between Curtis and Harding was that of close friends from

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<sup>47</sup>Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup>Quoted in Sullivan, Our Times, VI, 73. See also Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 56.

their days in the Senate. Somehow the fact that Curtis served as honorary pall-bearer at Harding's funeral seems only right.<sup>49</sup> As Republican party whip, seeker of placid party relations, Curtis may have felt a deep-down touch of sudden relief as well as grief upon attending the burial of an embarrassed and embarrassing man.

Perhaps Curtis reached the apex of his career at the same time as Calvin Coolidge. He had come to know Coolidge only since Coolidge had come to Washington to preside over the Senate as Harding's Vice President.<sup>50</sup> Within a week after the voters of the United States voiced their overwhelming approval of Coolidge in the election of 1924, Lodge died.<sup>51</sup> Curtis was elected majority leader in one of the world's most august assemblies, the United States Senate.<sup>52</sup> Curtis headed the joint committee which had charge of the inauguration of Coolidge on March 4, 1925, and Curtis was the Senator selected to ride with Coolidge in the parade.

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<sup>49</sup>Sullivan, Our Times, VI, 256.

<sup>50</sup>Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy, p. 160.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>52</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949, p. 1045. According to Arthur Capper, "Some Benefits Senator Curtis Has Procured for Kansas and Kansans," The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B, "He is the first Republican from the West to be selected leader of his party in the Senate. . ."



These honors were the result of his holding the chairmanship of the Senate committee on rules.<sup>53</sup>

President Coolidge found that Curtis's friendship was a valuable asset during that last presidential term. Coolidge faced a Congress that was determined to act quite independently of the wishes of the executive branch. Actually Coolidge believed that as President he should stand aloof from the day-to-day workings of the legislative branch of the government. The Senate took the initiative in a Congress determined to enact a legislative program of their own liking.<sup>54</sup> But when Coolidge felt that his ideas on a particular issue should prevail, he could generally count on Curtis's support. For example, Coolidge was committed to a program of economy in government. The Congress nevertheless attempted to enact a salary bill for postal employees that was defeated "only by the drastic efforts of Senator Curtis."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B; Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 82.

<sup>54</sup>William Allen White, Calvin Coolidge: The Man Who Is President (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), p. 172, hereafter cited as Calvin Coolidge.

<sup>55</sup>Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy, p. 221. Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 82, declares that the close relationship between Coolidge and Curtis resulted in near unanimity between President and Congress, a rather fanciful concept. White, A Puritan in Babylon, p. 319, characterizes Senate Republican leader Curtis as an "errand boy."

The legislative record of Senator Curtis is in most instances quite vague. He identified himself with certain issues most of them being generally advocated by or advantageous to his home state. Again much reliance must be placed upon the account by his fellow Republican and Topeka neighbor,<sup>56</sup> Senator Capper, an account with an obvious bias. Curtis was responsible for the first capital building of Kansas being turned over to Kansas. He saved Kansas taxpayers \$80,000 by inducing the national government to repair a bridge at Fort Riley which was normally a responsibility of the State. The Federal road acts of 1916, 1921, 1924, and 1926, were so amended upon his insistence that Kansas was able to secure more federal aid to road building. He introduced and worked for the passage of the Adjusted Compensation act which provided for soldiers' bonuses for veterans of World War I. For this he received the plaudits of the G. A. R., an organization that owed much to Curtis's work on behalf of Civil War Veterans. Capper also wrote in 1926 that "In this last session of congress, 75 private

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<sup>56</sup>"In most states the Senators represent sections. By chance Arthur Capper and Charles Curtis . . . are both from Topeka and oddly enough have their homes on opposite corners of Topeka Avenue at Eleventh Street." Seitz, Tespee to Capital, p. 180.



bills granting pensions to soldiers and soldiers' widows, introduced by him became law."<sup>57</sup>

Of course, Curtis was an avid supporter of all legislation he deemed beneficial to Kansas farmers.

In 1918, he joined with other members of the house and senate and actively and vigorously sided in securing loans by the government to farmers in drouth stricken districts in Kansas and elsewhere to buy seed wheat. The sum of over four million dollars was loaned for this purpose. Under the provisions of the law, a crop of less than five bushels an acre was to be considered a failure and the borrower was to be released from repayment, but those who raised more than six bushels to the acre were to contribute to a fund which was to be used to settle the loans of those whose wheat crop for 1918 was a failure. A number of loans were made in Kansas and did not have to be repaid because of this provision of law regarding crop failures. The senator proposed and had adopted an amendment to the agricultural bill which produced the same relief in 1919.<sup>58</sup>

In 1921 the Farm Loan Board was without funds and unable to sell its bonds; hence it could not fulfill its function of making loans to farmers. Curtis introduced and "put thru" a measure authorizing the government to buy \$25,000,000 of the bonds that enabled the government not only to make loans, but also to offer the farm loans at five and one-half

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<sup>57</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926,  
p. 5B.

<sup>58</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926,  
p. 5B.

per cent instead of the previous six per cent.<sup>59</sup> He proposed most of the amendments to the tariff act of 1922 (Fordney-McCumber) that provided protection for farmers and stockmen at rates higher than ever before.<sup>60</sup> It would be interesting to know if Curtis knew the futility of his proposals for relieving depressed farm prices through the imposition of protective tariffs on products of which an exportable and unsegregated surplus existed. He probably did not. But had he known, one can be fairly certain that he would have continued to support these, so long as he could make an appeal to the farmers of Kansas on the theme of protection at election time. Curtis was a faithful advocate of protective tariffs in general, partly because this was good Republican party politics and partly because many Kansans--illogical as it may seem--were strong for the tariff.

Another issue for which Curtis took a stand was prohibition. This too was ever popular among the majority of Kansans, and from the time he became county attorney until 1932, he made good political use of prohibition.

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<sup>59</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B. The New York Times, June 16, 1928, p. 5; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 177.

<sup>60</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B.



According to his biographer, Curtis was responsible for preventing the defeat of the bill that raised the prohibition enforcement unit to the status of a bureau in 1928.<sup>61</sup> He also was credited with the passage of an anti-narcotic act.<sup>62</sup> Curtis was an abstainer from alcoholic drinks, and sincere in his opposition to the intemperate use of those beverages.

Curtis continued his efforts on behalf of the Indians. For example, his sympathetic biographer claims that it was largely due to Curtis's efforts that the Osage Indians became wealthy because he made certain that their mineral

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<sup>61</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 176. Curtis once found himself faced with a dilemma arising from his stand for temperance. He granted Albert D. Lesker the use of his name as an endorsement in an advertisement for Lucky Strike cigarettes because he owed Lesker a favor (Lesker to Curtis, April 14, 1927, Curtis Collection, Kansas Historical Society). The Women's Christian Temperance Union protested to Curtis, saying that the good people of Kansas who had worked so long against the legalized sale of cigarettes were surely disappointed. Furthermore, even though they knew Curtis never used tobacco, this incident would probably force them to take his name from the temperance blotters distributed to school children. It was also predicted that, if he ever ran for office again, he would lose many votes because of the advertisement (W. C. T. U. to Curtis, August 10, 1927, Curtis Collection, Kansas Historical Society). Curtis explained he made the endorsement as a personal favor for a friend and expressed his regret for having offended the temperance element. He advised that they do what they thought best about the blotters (Curtis to W. C. T. U., August 17, 1927, Curtis Collection, Kansas Historical Society).

<sup>62</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B.

rights were protected when Oklahoma was joined to Indian territory. Seitz set their average income from oil wells at \$10,000 per capita.<sup>63</sup>

Seitz also extolled Curtis as a champion of economy in government, a useful political virtue at any time, and particularly popular in the Coolidge administration. Seitz asserted: "It has been figured that by reason of bills and amendments started by Senator Curtis, the Government has saved over \$83,000,000."<sup>64</sup> Capper stated that Curtis was an early advocate of the budget system and of sending all appropriation bills to one Senate committee to avoid duplicate appropriations. The same friendly Senator listed among Curtis's achievements the introduction of an amendment that allowed the President to consolidate customs districts and, as a result \$350,000 was saved annually from the time of its passage.<sup>65</sup>

During his Senate career then it can be said that Curtis generally backed prohibition, women's rights, the

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<sup>63</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 180. See also Indian Defense Association of Central and Northern California to Curtis, March 19, 1927, Curtis Collection, Kansas Historical Society, thanking him for his efforts in behalf of Indians in general and specifically for his aid in defeating the Flathead Power Amendment.

<sup>64</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 173.

<sup>65</sup>Capper, The Topeka Daily Capital, August 8, 1926, p. 5B.



protective tariff, farm benefits, economy in government, the rights of Indians, and veterans benefits. In addition, it can be said that he was noted for advocating that which the Republican party happened to suggest, for attempting to aid the Coolidge administration, and for asserting the claims of Kansans collectively and individually. Obviously a set of loyalties can lead to conflicts, and this happened at times to Curtis. Furthermore, the claims made by his admirers in terms of his being an instrumental force in passing certain legislative acts must be tempered by the knowledge that all legislation owes its passage into law to concurrence by a Congressional majority.

In 1927 Curtis voted for the McNary-Haugen bill, then voted to uphold the veto of the act by Coolidge.<sup>66</sup> Seitz pointed out that Curtis voted for the bill, "though he personally favored less extreme plans."<sup>67</sup> One can surmise that less extreme plans in terms of Curtis's loyalties would have involved tariff measures, but not the expenditure of governmental funds. However, as Senator from Kansas it would have been poor politics to cast an initial vote against the bill for farm relief. And his later adverse vote could be

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<sup>66</sup>The New York Times, June 16, 1928, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup>Seitz, Teepse to Capital, p. 176.

rationalized by the voters much more easily in terms of loyalty to the quite-popular Coolidge.

While in the Senate Curtis had the opportunity to act in the name of Republican regularity and support of the administration even before Coolidge became President. In July, 1921, the Norris-Sinclair bill came up for debate. It proposed to establish what in many respects resembled the old Food Administration. The Harding administration was opposed to the bill. When the bill came before the Senate Lodge moved for adjournment, but that was voted down. But the administration had another plan for defeating the farm bloc, and the farm state Senator played a vital role in the plan. Coolidge had let it be known that as presiding officer in the Senate, he would recognize a friend of the bill; therefore, the farm bloc was confident of getting action on its measure. However, as the bill came to the floor of the Senate, Coolidge left the chair, Curtis took over as presiding officer and promptly recognized Minnesota Senator Kellogg who presented the administration bill for consideration.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to his original assignment to the Committee on the University of the United States, Curtis had committee

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<sup>68</sup>Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy, pp. 104-105; White, A Puritan in Babylon, p. 237.



assignments concerned with fisheries, Canadian relations, Indian affairs, finance and appropriations, and was chairman of the rules committee.<sup>69</sup>

In summary the following evaluation by an anonymous critic of Curtis, while somewhat cynical, may help to offset what has been cited previously:

For a third of a century, in the House and in the Senate, the Hon. Charley Curtis of Kansas drew his salary and mileage, spread broadcast in unrestrained generosity the garden seeds and moral documents paid for out of the Treasury, planted his share of patronage where it served him best, upheld heroically the hand of the President--if His Excellency happened to be a Republican--and in all other ways was a steady, dependable, unquestioning party plug, dull, regular and conforming, no worse than the rest of the pack and in many ways a lot better. He was, by political standards, a pretty square shooter. He never went Red hunting, and if he waved the flag and occasionally snored sonorously about home and mother he was at least not of the smug, nauseous type of Senator Dave Reed of Pennsylvania, and neither was he of the buffoon type of Tom Heflin. Coming from Kansas, he was a voting dry of course. But he was fond of a good game of draw poker, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to take a \$1.25 pot from Senator Jim Couzens of Michigan, who, despite his \$100,000,000 Ford-made fortune, would always howl in anguish. He didn't profess to be a regular churchgoer but he was a keen and regular patron of the ponies. No one ever accused him of being a Progressive, but the feminists nevertheless called him friend, and it is one of the proudest of his claims that he led the floor fight for the Nineteenth Amendment and was the author of a bill protecting the rights of American women sufficiently affluent to hire foreigners to marry them and of another creating a series of swell Federal women's prisons for ladies tangled up with the law. Finally his vote was recorded for the Child Labor

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<sup>69</sup>NCAE, Current vol. C, 7.

Amendment--and whether the fact that Kansas has no mills had anything to do with it is something that we need not go into.<sup>70</sup>

Generally what was said of Congressman Curtis is valid also for Senator Curtis. He continued to be known for brevity in speech. He seldom took the floor to make a speech. He sponsored few pet bills and these few were not important. His name was not attached to major legislation. "The historian studying those times must take account of Curtis of Kansas under Coolidge quite as much as historians must know about Gorman in Grover Cleveland's day, or of Don Cameron in Lincoln's day or of John Hancock in Washington's day."<sup>71</sup> Various evaluations of Curtis's contribution have been made. These have been of various shades of opinion but all agree that Curtis had a major part in the shaping of the legislation of his day.<sup>72</sup> ". . . several times, standing upon the floor of the Senate, he has spoken briefly in commonplace sentences, introducing motions of procedure, or even motions to adjourn, but thereby has vastly controlled national destinies. For he is the voice of the organization."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>"Heap Big Chief," American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 401.

<sup>71</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 173.

<sup>72</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

<sup>73</sup>White, Calvin Coolidge, p. 173.



White emphasized that this was the voice of the organization: Curtis had not contributed "to the great national tendencies," not to economic thought while standing on the floors of Congress.<sup>74</sup> One account hinted that the sole contribution of Curtis consisted of such phrases as: 'Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.' 'Mr. President, I ask a roll-call.' 'Mr. President, I rise to a point of order.' 'Mr. President, I move the Senate do now adjourn.'<sup>75</sup> Another account branded this a virtue, saying that while Curtis did not participate often in debates and exercised most of his leadership in whispered conferences, he was still one of the most able leaders in Senate history--a leader who did not believe that talk could accomplish much.<sup>76</sup>

Curtis was influential. He was a politician through and through. He was regular; he was conservative. And perhaps the cynic who remarked "that for Curtis the trinity meant the Republican party, the high protective tariff, and the Grand Army of the Republic" was less than comprehensive in his judgment, but humorously near to being half right.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Oswald Garrison Villard, Prophets True and False (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), p. 154.

<sup>76</sup>The New York Times, June 16, 1928, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup>Malin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136.

In any case, in the year 1928 Curtis thought seriously of himself as a potential President of the United States.

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Appendix



## CHAPTER VI

### VICE-PRESIDENT CURTIS

As early as 1924 Curtis and his immediate family had thought of him as a potential candidate for the Presidency. His wife, an invalid in the last days of her life, urged the devoted Curtis to leave her and seek the nomination. While Curtis did not attend the Republican convention that year, his half-sister, Dolly, and her husband, E. E. Gann, went to the convention to work for his nomination for at least the Vice Presidency. They did not seriously advance his name for the top office after Coolidge had announced his candidacy. While Curtis was considered for the Vice Presidency in that year, the office went to Charles G. Dawes, after Frank Lowden had refused it.<sup>1</sup> It was later said that Coolidge had refused to have Curtis share the ticket with him because of Curtis's support of the soldiers' bonus.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dolly [Curtis] Gann, Dolly Gann's Book (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1933), pp. 65-77; William Allen White, A Puritan in Babylon: The Story of Calvin Coolidge (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), pp. 301-305, hereafter cited as A Puritan in Babylon, includes an account of the Vice-Presidential nomination in 1924.

<sup>2</sup>"Heep Big Chief," American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 8.

In October, 1927, after Coolidge had made his famous statement that he did not choose to run, Curtis announced that he would be a candidate for President. Dolly Gann made a trip home to Kansas and secured the blessing of prominent Republicans of the State.<sup>3</sup> According to his campaign biographer, Curtis sought the nomination because: (1) he felt the nomination would go to a Western politician; and (2) he felt his long experience in the legislative branch of the government qualified him to hold the office.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps Curtis supposed that the party owed him the nomination as a reward for his years of faithful work in Congress.<sup>5</sup> One critic suggested that Curtis believed his chances in that year stemmed from his being a representative from the farming West with a conservative voting record in keeping with the wishes of Eastern conservatives. Furthermore, it was possible that Curtis foresaw a deadlock between Hoover and Lowden similar to that which resulted in Harding's nomination in 1920, and perhaps he visioned himself the

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<sup>3</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 92.

<sup>4</sup>Don C. Seitz, From Kaw Teepee to Capital: The Life Story of Charles Curtis, Indian, Who Has Risen to High Estate (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1928), pp. 193-194, hereafter cited as Teepee to Capital.

<sup>5</sup>Klyde N. Young and Lamer Middleton, Heirs Apparent: The Vice-Presidents of the United States (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1948), p. 282, hereafter cited as Heirs Apparent.



compromise candidate. Moreover, it was asserted that Curtis could enhance his potential as a candidate for the Vice Presidency by making a strong race for the Presidential nomination. The same critic does not accuse Curtis of overestimating his own abilities in announcing his candidacy. That writer contended that it was apparent to everyone, including Curtis, that the occupancy of the White House by Harding and Coolidge proved that mediocrity was not at that time a deterrent to becoming President.

Curtis set about securing the nomination in a methodical and traditional manner. He wrote letters to political leaders all over the country. He opened Curtis headquarters in various states. He joined the informal coalition of Republicans that were opposing the strong boom for Hoover. "To nominate Hoover, he said publicly and privately, would be to place a hopeless burden" upon the party.<sup>6</sup>

Curtis became the favorite son candidate of Kansas. Actually it had been known by many as early as September, 1927, that Curtis would probably seek the nomination.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 402-403. See also Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 282; Oswald Garrison Villard, Prophets True and False (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), pp. 150-151.

<sup>7</sup>For example, Henry F. Lippitt (Providence, R. I.) to Curtis, September, 1927, Curtis Collection, Kansas Historical Society, discussed possible candidates that could

W. A. White had planned to manage Hoover's campaign in Kansas. But when Curtis entered the race, he came to the support of the native son. Evidently the Curtis faction in Kansas paid for this by not opposing Clyde Reed, Sr., the candidate of the White faction, in the gubernatorial contest. White explained that a liberal such as himself could support the conservative Curtis. 'Isn't there something in politics more than the herd realities? Isn't sentiment worth while? All these things are in the Curtis candidacy in Kansas, and they are a credit to human nature.'<sup>8</sup> White told Curtis in March, 1928, that the Kansas convention had taken up his candidacy with an unbelievable degree of enthusiasm. White reported that old adversaries of Curtis had come out for him, as well as had his friends.<sup>9</sup> Outside of Kansas, however, enthusiasm for the candidacy of Curtis was extremely limited.<sup>10</sup>

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carry Rhode Island and advised that Charles Evans Hughes was probably the favorite because of connections with Brown University. Dr. [M.D.] and Mrs. F. A. Cogswell to Curtis, September 15, 1927, Curtis Collection, Kansas Historical Society, offered Curtis any help whatsoever for his presidential boom in return for the "priceless favor" he had done for them in June, 1919.

<sup>8</sup>Walter Johnson, William Allen White's America (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1947), p. 403.

<sup>9</sup>William Allen White to Curtis, March 10, 1928, Curtis Collection, Kansas Historical Society.

<sup>10</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 282.



Curtis and his Kansas supporters suffered their ups and downs before the convention met. They felt considerably encouraged when Lowden showed formidable pre-convention strength. They were thinking of the possibility of a convention deadlock.<sup>11</sup> One day he heard that all twenty votes of the Oklahoma delegation would go to him. The next day he heard that J. N. Fincher of Hutchinson, who was pledged to present the Curtis nomination at the convention, had told certain Congressmen that with Curtis eliminated the Kansas delegation would go over to Hoover. It was reported that New York would give Curtis forty to fifty of its votes. Soon after that he heard that Henry J. Allen had been praising Hoover in his speeches.<sup>12</sup>

Most writers on the national scene greeted the announcement that Curtis would seek the nomination for President with apathy at best and occasionally with hostility. Typical articles pictured him as having had a colorful beginning, a real reputation for political infighting in Kansas, and an almost totally undistinguished voting record in Congress where he had wielded real power. They classified him as a contender to be taken seriously, but a contender

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<sup>11</sup>Joe Nickel, "Interest Grows in Presidential Nomination Race," The Topeka Daily Capital, May 6, 1928, p. 3B.

<sup>12</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, May 6, 1928, p. 2B.

whose chances were slim.<sup>13</sup> Villard took a dim view of Curtis's qualification for the office:

If the Republican Presidential contest of 1928 should taper down to Charles Curtis it would simply mean that cowardice, timidity, and moral bankruptcy had done their worst. His nomination would be the apotheosis of mediocrity; Mr. Babbitt would thereby come into his own.<sup>14</sup>

About the only unique element seen by anyone in the possibility of Curtis becoming President was that it would have been the first time anyone with Indian blood had attained that position.<sup>15</sup> It was summed up years after Curtis had passed from the scene in these words:

Charles Curtis was far from a brilliant statesman and, indeed, only a cut above the mediocre. Perhaps it is not an unfair estimate to say of him that he had the qualities necessary to a wheel-horse Republican as well as those usually required to win the Vice-Presidency.<sup>16</sup>

A Senate investigating committee discovered that the Curtis campaign was conducted on a remarkably limited budget. By May, 1928, he had spent only \$14,437 for campaign expenses. He had received \$11,685, mostly from friends with

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<sup>13</sup>For example, Charles Merz, "Preconvention Portraits," The Independent, CXX (January 7, 1928), 6, 7, & 24; Charles G. Ross, "Charles Curtis of Kansas," The Outlook, CIL (May 16, 1928), 83, 84, & 118.

<sup>14</sup>Villard, Prophets True and False, p. 150.

<sup>15</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 278.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 283.



no contribution exceeding \$500. The money had for the most part been raised and spent by Curtis for President clubs in Kansas, New York State, New York City, Oklahoma, Washington, and Missouri. He revealed that his campaign headquarters would be headed by George A. Clark and that about \$2,000 worth of posters would be distributed in Kansas City at convention time. Curtis's campaign appeared in stark contrast to the customary million-dollar campaigns by Republican hopefuls.<sup>17</sup>

In the same month Curtis was much heartened by Hoover's failure to win the Indiana primary election. To him this indicated that Hoover drew well in the city but had a "farm cloud" hanging over his head.<sup>18</sup> When Hoover declined to try for delegation votes in Kansas, this was interpreted to be an indication that Hoover feared Curtis more than other favorite sons, all of whom he had challenged in their home states.<sup>19</sup> Curtis had strong friends in Pennsylvania, New York, and in the New England states who would favor him if neither Coolidge nor Hughes was available.<sup>20</sup> It was also

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<sup>17</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, May 8, 1928, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, May 10, 1928, p. 1;  
May 11, 1928, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Editorial, The Topeka Daily Capital, May 10, 1928,  
p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, May 16, 1928, p. 11B;  
May 14, 1928, p. 3.

reported that the Nebraska-Wisconsin coalition controlled by Senator Norris favored Curtis over Dawes, and it was said that the Dakotas would be satisfied with Curtis; Kansas and Oklahoma were pledged to support Curtis. It was intimated that Curtis might yet have a chance because the other candidates had done various things in reference to the farm problem that would alienate them from the convention. It was revealed that The National Farm News, a nationwide periodical printed in Washington, was soon to print an article entitled "Farm Record of Senator Curtis 100 per cent; Kansas played an important role in fight for farm relief."<sup>21</sup> But all this was so much wishful thinking. A hint of impending defeat came when Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon commented that Hoover was the nearest to what the Republicans wanted in a candidate.<sup>22</sup> Mellon was influential in the crucial Pennsylvania delegation.

The Republican convention opened in Kansas City, Missouri, on June 11, 1928. Curtis and members of his family arrived with high hopes for success. On hand were E. E. Gann, Dolly, Curtis's daughters, Leona Knight and Permelia George, and his son, Harry Curtis. There were

<sup>21</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, May 16, 1928, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup>The Topeka Daily Capital, May 13, 1928, p. 11B; May 14, 1928, p. 3.



Curtis headquarters at the Hotel Muehlebach in the charge of John Breyfogle and at the Hotel Baltimore directed by George A. Clark. The family members made themselves available at headquarters to run campaign errands. Dolly Gann said that Hoover's prospects were the talk of the country, but that the Curtis party was hopeful. After all Hoover had served brilliantly in Belgium and had held the post of Secretary of Commerce, but he had no political experience. Furthermore, among politicians Curtis had many friends who would be loath to withhold the nomination from one who had served the party faithfully for years. They were sure that the contest would be spirited and intended to work for the nomination as hard as possible without endangering party unity.

Gann claimed that Hoover's supporters had come to town ahead of convention time and spread rumors that the other candidates, especially Curtis, were not sincere in seeking the Presidency, wanting instead the Vice Presidency. Curtis tried to stop this talk with a statement upon arrival at Kansas City. He stated that the Presidency was still his goal and urged the Republicans not to nominate a person who would put Republicans on the defensive from the day he is named.<sup>23</sup> But his hopes were jolted early.

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<sup>23</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 90-95. Hoover claimed that Mellon called him the night before the convention

It was believed that Mellon would control the Pennsylvania delegation and possibly largely control the convention. His arrival was eagerly awaited. But something happened on the train trip to change that. Upon arrival William S. Vare spoke for the Pennsylvania delegation and stated that a majority of the delegation's votes would go to Hoover. Upon Mellon's motion at the delegation caucus it was decided to cast the State's vote for Hoover. This practically ended the hopes of all other candidates and the other state leaders hurried to get on the Hoover bandwagon. Attempts to start booms around other candidates died quickly. Many of the candidates were committed to Hoover by pre-convention pledges. Hoover's machine had been very efficient in building a strong pro-Hoover element.<sup>24</sup>

J. N. Fincher of Hutchinson put Curtis's name in nomination.<sup>25</sup> But Curtis could not make a show of it. Hoover was nominated Thursday, June 14, on the first ballot.

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opened and promised to deliver the Pennsylvania delegation. Hoover says Vare sensed this and put himself out in front by making the announcement. Herbert Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933 (3 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), II, 194. Hoover said that if there was a favorite among his opponents, it was Curtis. Ibid., II, 192.

<sup>24</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 90-95.

<sup>25</sup>Seitz, Teepee to Capital, p. 194.



He received 837 votes.<sup>26</sup> When the hysteria of acclaim for Hoover died down the convention turned to the selection of a Vice President. At first Curtis declined to be considered when feelers were put out to him about the office. Others who were in the running for the second-place spot on the ballot were A. P. Fuller of Massachusetts, Chase S. Osborn of Michigan, S. A. Baker of Missouri, John Q. Tilson of Connecticut, Hanford MacNider, Herman L. Ekern, and Charles G. Dawes. Gann claimed that various proposals were made all through the night begging Curtis to accept and that when the Hoover delegation promised that he would receive almost no opposition, he consented to take the nomination as a matter of his principle of Republican loyalty.<sup>27</sup> This should be qualified by the knowledge that only the day before Curtis had been opposing Hoover to the extent that he predicted that the party might have to apologize for Hoover if he was nominated.

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<sup>26</sup>Karl Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1948), p. 249. Coolidge stated: "A strong group of the party in and outside of the Senate made the mistake of undertaking to oppose Mr. Hoover with a large number of local candidates, which finally resulted in their not developing enough strength for any particular candidate to make a showing sufficient to impress the convention." Calvin Coolidge, The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge (New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, 1929), p. 246.

<sup>27</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 96-97.

Curtis's name was put in nomination for the Vice Presidency by Senator William E. Borah of Idaho. One of the seconding speeches was made by his daughter, Leona, who was a member of the Rhode Island delegation. It was said that the convention turned without premeditation to Curtis;<sup>28</sup> at least it can be said that little opposition developed. There were perhaps two principal reasons for his appeal at the convention: (1) his candidacy helped appease the farm element that was disappointed when Lowden failed to beat Hoover; (2) it was just natural to reward the sixty-eight year-old party regular with the consolation prize. Certain writers suggested that Curtis may have accepted the nomination with a memory of Hiram Johnson refusing the Vice-Presidential nomination in 1920 only to see Coolidge take the coveted top office upon Harding's death.<sup>29</sup> "There was a scramble for second place, but Senator Charles Curtis had things all sewed up. On the first ballot he received 1052 votes. For the first time in the nation's history both candidates came from states west of the Mississippi."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 98; Seitz, Teepee to Capital, pp. 203-207.

<sup>29</sup>For example, S. T. Williamson, "A Man Who Must Dine for His Country," The New York Times, March 15, 1931, sec. V, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup>Schriftgiesser, This Was Normalcy, p. 249.



The general outcome of the 1928 campaign and election is so famous that it need not be recounted here except in a general way. It is often said that Hoover and Curtis had little to do in the way of serious campaigning. Al Smith was on the defensive from the start and the weight of the campaign fell to him. While this may be an overstatement, it is not difficult to agree that neither party campaigned on the real and grave national issues.<sup>31</sup> Strangely enough Curtis caused his own little ripple in the line of bigotry that played such a prominent part in the 1928 campaign.

Suspicious Ku Kluxers may see the hand of Rome not only in the Democratic but in the Republican ticket. It now turns out that Charles Curtis, Vice-Presidential candidate on the Republican ticket, was baptized by a Jesuit. It was when he was an infant that he was taken to the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church at St. Mary's, Kansas. His mother had attended St. Mary's convent. . . . Hoover's teammate is thus of Indian ancestry and partly of Indian training, and is still a member of the Kaw tribe. Though baptized as a Catholic, he is now a member of the Methodist Church. It was only a few years ago that Mr. Curtis himself learned of his Catholic baptism.<sup>32</sup>

Curtis found himself literally forced to take up public speaking. In Kansas he had managed to base his campaigns more on hand-shaking than on public speaking. It was noted that his speeches were platitudinous and repetitious.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 256-257.

<sup>32</sup>"Born An Indian, Baptized a Catholic," The Outlook, GIL (July 11, 1928), 405.

Curtis made appearances both from train platforms and at large indoor gatherings. He made use of the emotional value of flag-waving, bands, a dancing Indian princess, and handshaking when possible. A critic made particular note of Curtis having become exasperated with a heckler whose questions would not be stilled by Curtis's answers. It was alleged that Curtis said the heckler was 'too damned dumb to understand,' evidently because the speaker had been rather successful in putting Curtis on the defensive.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps it did not matter what Curtis said in this campaign. After all he was tied to Hoover and Republican prosperity and on the side opposite the controversial Al Smith. One could hardly think that the election would have had any other result than it did had Curtis done no campaigning at all.

Curtis was faced with a dilemma immediately upon his election to the Vice Presidency. President Coolidge asked that Curtis stay on in the Senate until inauguration time to continue his role of friend of the administration program.

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<sup>33</sup>American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 408-409. Included is an amusing story of Curtis having been given the nickname "Egg Charley" by reporters following the "vice presidential medicine show": Curtis would invariably include in his speeches a good deal of tariff, and just as invariably would tell how he had gotten protection on eggs for farmers and how this had been maintained because of his vigilance against certain insidious special interests who proposed to him that the duty be discontinued. Curtis discontinued the story when it became a circulating joke in political circles.



But Curtis was being pressured by his political friends in Kansas to resign his seat before the newly elected Governor, Clyde Reed of the W. A. White progressive faction, took office. The lame-duck Governor, Ben M. Paulen, could be counted on to appoint a Senator more acceptable to both Curtis and his friends. However, Curtis made his resignation effective March 3, 1929, the day prior to the inauguration and the patronage plum came under the control of Reed. Reed was known to favor Henry J. Allen, former Governor who had supported the Reed campaign and who had been out of favor with Curtis since the Bull Moose split in 1912, but he hesitated to stir up the opposition in Kansas unless Hoover would publicly favor the appointment. This was likely because Allen had handled the publicity for the Republican National Committee in Kansas during the preceding campaign, but Hoover was not eager to intervene in a political situation that was so local in character. Furthermore, he hesitated recommending an appointment that was obnoxious to the Vice President. But after the inauguration Hoover assured Reed in a private conference that Allen was satisfactory and the appointment was made. Curtis accepted the defeat with a shrug and even made up with Allen when the latter came to Washington to begin serving his term.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 83-84; Roy Buckingham, "Kansas Governor Wins on Program," The New York Times,

Curtis was inaugurated on March 4, 1929. His salary was \$15,000 per year as compared to the \$10,000 per year he received as a Senator.<sup>35</sup> Upon the recommendation of Coolidge Congress had appropriated \$5,000 for a new official car for the Vice President.<sup>36</sup> He was the first Vice President to take the oath of office on a Bible in the same manner as the President always had.<sup>37</sup> Since Curtis employed a woman as secretary instead of the customary man as secretary to the Vice President, he scored another minor first. Miss Lola M. Williams of Columbus, Kansas, who had been working for Curtis for some time became one of the first females to venture out on the Senate floor, traditionally a masculine monopoly.<sup>38</sup> The Topeka Drum Corps, featuring an eighty-two year-old fife player journeyed to Washington to drum him into office; it was claimed that this had always been done

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March 17, 1929, sec. III, p. 2; The New York Times, February 4, 1929, p. 22; February 7, 1929, p. 1; February 21, 1929, p. 12; March 3, 1929, p. 2; March 5, 1929, p. 4; March 29, 1929, p. 9; March 30, 1929, p. 1; March 31, 1929, p. 24; April 1, 1929, p. 24; April 9, 1929, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup>The New York Times, February 7, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup>The New York Times, January 6, 1929, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup>The New York Times, February 27, 1929, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup>The New York Times, March 3, 1929, p. 4; March 24, 1929, sec. XI, p. 4.



for Curtis since he became county attorney in 1884.<sup>39</sup> Other hokum in the tradition of American politics included the presentation of several gavels and the receipt of a comical telegram from the leader of an Indian delegation from Oklahoma, asking for horses to meet the train so the squaws and children wouldn't have to walk, a humorous way of asking that transportation from the station be provided.<sup>40</sup>

As Charles G. Dawes left office he recalled to mind the fact that upon his inauguration four years earlier, he had criticized the Senate rules and had vowed to get the rules changed. He had to admit that he had not changed his mind, but neither had he changed the rules. After the oath had been administered to Curtis he evoked chuckles when in his inaugural speech he assured the Senators that he had no intention of trying to change the rules; the members of the Senate would make the rules and he would preside in accordance with those rules.<sup>41</sup> It was later pointed out by certain attentive radio listeners that Curtis made a mistake in the oath he gave to certain of the new Senators which in fact made the oath invalid if anyone had cared to press

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<sup>39</sup>The New York Times, February 24, 1929, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup>The New York Times, March 6, 1932, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup>The New York Times, March 5, 1929, p. 4, included is the text of Curtis's speech; Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 105-106.

the issue.<sup>42</sup> The inaugural parade was a rain-soaked ride in open cars. Dolly accompanied her brother on the ride. This was in keeping with her position of official hostess for widower Curtis which he had announced to Washington society.<sup>43</sup>

Curtis moved into a specially created suite of offices in the Senate Office Building. These rooms were much better in appointment, much lighter, and much roomier than those which Dawes had occupied. Curtis had decorated it with Indian mementos and favorable cartoon caricatures of himself as an Indian. One writer remarked that it was startling to enter a modern office and find Indians lounging around the premises, as they were on the particular day that writer visited Curtis. It was reputed that Curtis kept his office open to everyone more of the time than almost anyone else in Washington. He often stressed his desire not to escape the public, as had some previous Vice Presidents, but to welcome all visitors.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>The New York Times, March 15, 1929, p. 12; March 20, 1929, p. 28.

<sup>43</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 107.

<sup>44</sup>American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 405-406; S. J. Wolf, "Senate's New Ruler Long a Senator," The New York Times, April 14, 1929, sec. V, p. 7; The New York Times, January 8, 1929, p. 28; October 24, 1931, p. 10.



Curtis took virtually no part in the Hoover administration. His advice was seldom sought, and had it been sought he would have had little to contribute.<sup>45</sup> Hoover invited Curtis to attend cabinet meetings, a practice which Harding had followed in relation to Coolidge, but which Coolidge had never applied in the case of Dawes. It was speculated by some that this was an effort on the part of Hoover to promote a closer relationship between the executive and legislative branches of the government. Curtis accepted the offer, and he attended some of the cabinet meetings. But one editorial was prophetic in saying that about the only thing Curtis would learn about the workings of the government by attending cabinet meetings would be that it was futile for a Vice President to attend cabinet meetings. Furthermore, Curtis and Hoover were never intimate friends, nor did they have a deep respect for the opinions of one another.<sup>46</sup> However, it was alleged that Curtis had a private telephone line installed which connected his living quarters directly with the White House in the event that Hoover should find it necessary to call for Curtis in an emergency.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 282.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.; The New York Times, March 8, 1929, p. 1; March 9, 1929, p. 6; Editorial, March 29, 1929, p. 18.

<sup>47</sup>Editorial, The New York Times, February 15, 1929, p. 26.

While it has been said that "Curtis was a relief to the Senate after the table-pounding and dictatorial Dawes,"<sup>48</sup> most writers contemporaneous with Curtis were rather critical of the role Curtis assumed as Vice President. It was expected that his long years of experience in the Senate would naturally lead to rapport between the Senate and its presiding officer. And he did in fact have much experience in presiding over that august group from his days as Republican floor leader. However, it was charged that Curtis became a different person by attempting to surround the office of Vice President with a special dignity that was incongruous with the "arm-circler" that had been known as "Charley" before his elevation to the second highest elective office in the land. He had been the delight of reporters who could count on being able to call him off the floor of the Senate for a tip on what to expect to happen during impending proceedings. But it was said that Vice-President Curtis did not cater to the reporters in the same way. Curtis had been noted for requesting that he be called "Charley." Yet it was alleged that Vice-President Curtis would reply to the use of his given name with a rebuff that reminded the guilty speaker that he was now the Vice President. It was said that his mode of dress, his offices, and his residence all underwent

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<sup>48</sup>Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 282.



a change that was indicative of the new Curtis demeanor.<sup>49</sup> Varying explanations were advanced to explain the change wrought in Curtis. It was said that he was really the same "Charley," except that Curtis thought the office demanded a certain amount of dignity and he was going to prove that he could provide plenty of pomp.<sup>50</sup> Another explanation offered was that Curtis was too conscious that he stood to become President in the event that anything happened to Hoover. This article accused Curtis of having "complexes" which stemmed from the idea that he had lost the Presidential nomination because of a "double-cross" and that he yet viewed himself as Presidential timber.<sup>51</sup> However, another account stated that Curtis enjoyed the "living death" of inquiring of one Senator whether or not he would yield to another. Furthermore, it was asserted that each new attempt to bring more prestige to the Vice Presidency merely drew the ridicule of the irreverent.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Editorial, The New York Times, February 14, 1929, p. 26; Editorial, December 6, 1931, sec. IX, p. 6; November 10, 1932, p. 5; American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 405-411, much of which is an attack upon the "new" Curtis, in addition to being a rather cynical and super-critical commentary on Curtis in general.

<sup>50</sup>Editorial, The New York Times, February 14, 1929, p. 26; Editorial, November 11, 1932, p. 18.

<sup>51</sup>American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 404-411.

<sup>52</sup>The New York Times, December 6, 1931, sec. IX, p. 6.

The position of Vice President must have been frustrating indeed to the man who had been accustomed to wielding so much real political power in the capacity of Republican floor leader. He did not often make the news relative to his official governmental capacity. It was noted on several occasions that as presiding officer he made certain interpretations of Senate rules. Senator Norris, author of a resolution for a lame-duck amendment to the Constitution which the Senate had passed five times and the House of Representatives had killed five times, denounced the leadership of the House for delaying the passage of the resolution which had again been passed on June 7, 1929. He claimed that the resolution was kept on the desk of Speaker Nicholas Longworth by the "arbitrary action" of the Speaker. A Senator objected that there was a Senate rule against speaking about the House in that manner. Curtis ruled that Senators could use their discretion. The complaining Senator objected that that was no rule. Curtis snapped back, "I'll make it a rule." He directed Norris to proceed. Later Speaker Longworth ruled a House member out of order for making disparaging remarks about the Senate, announcing that he would not allow it regardless of the ruling of the other presiding officer. Despite this turn of the other cheek



Curtis remained firm on his ruling, believing that he had ample backing for his stand.<sup>53</sup>

Curtis made rulings noted by the press during Senate consideration of the tariff in 1930. Curtis broke a 42-42 tie by voting "aye" to give conferees power to compromise with the House on a Senate proposal to repeal the President's flexible tariff power and return it to Congress.<sup>54</sup> On May 27 Curtis returned the tariff bill to conference ruling that conferees had exceeded their grant of power. The Senate debated that rule of order at length, but Curtis cited the rule that he was famous for having made years before that prohibited conferees from putting new legislation into bills in conference committee.<sup>55</sup> On June 5 Curtis again sent conferees back to committee, ruling that they had exceeded their grant of power in four instances.<sup>56</sup> The entire matter ended when it was noted that Curtis completed the last legislative step in the passage of the tariff by signing the bill while controversy over the bill continued in the Senate.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>The New York Times, April 22, 1930, p. 18; May 8, 1930, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup>The New York Times, May 20, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup>The New York Times, May 28, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup>The New York Times, June 6, 1930, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup>The New York Times, June 17, 1930, p. 1.

In the one instance when Curtis attempted to vitally influence a decision made by the administration it appeared that his efforts were of little avail. When the Grain Stabilization Corporation announced that it would sell a new maximum of 5,000,000 bushels of wheat per month, Curtis said he did not know where the Federal Farm Board obtained the information upon which to base such a policy. Curtis insisted that stabilization wheat should not be sold except at a minimum price of from 85¢ to \$1.00 per bushel. Curtis and Senator Capper took the matter up jointly and directly with the Board but with no success. Consequently, it was decided to take the matter directly to Hoover. Curtis and Hoover spent a weekend together at Rapidan Camp, Luray, Virginia. Part of the weekend was taken up by a long conference between Curtis and Hoover concerning the wheat stabilization policy. One can assume that he met with little success. Upon his return from the conference Curtis said he would present a new plan to the Federal Farm Board, but he was evasive about what the plan entailed. Soon thereafter the name of the Vice President was no longer linked with that issue in the newspaper reports. Perhaps, one can sense Curtis's disillusionment in that he first hinted that he might not seek reelection as Vice President during his efforts to change the Federal Farm Board decision.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>The New York Times, July 2, 1931, p. 30; July 3, 1931, p. 4; Editorial, July 3, 1931, p. 18; July 7, 1931,



Curtis received mention in the newspapers in 1930 in reference to prohibition. In a series of articles written by Maurice Campbell, who had been prohibition administrator of New York, it was charged that as a Senator Curtis had used his influence to force Campbell to issue alcohol permits. Curtis said in rebuttal that if his name had been used for that purpose it was done without his consent.<sup>59</sup> However, less than a month later one of the figures named by Campbell, Willis A. Buck, an enforcement agent, was discharged by William A. Joerling, a special Federal prohibition investigator. Campbell had claimed in his articles that Buck was retained in office after being charged with manipulating his expense account because Curtis had exerted his political influence in behalf of the agent. Curtis claimed that he had interceded for Buck only after he had learned that members of the Kansas Congressional delegation favored his retention because they felt Buck had not been given a fair trial.<sup>60</sup> Curtis was also involved in another series of articles. James M. Doran, who had been a prohibition commissioner, wrote a syndicated series for The Washington Post

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p. 40; July 13, 1931, p. 8; July 14, 1931, p. 39; July 26, 1931, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup>The New York Times, September 8, 1930, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup>The New York Times, October 4, 1930, p. 13.

and for The New York Evening World which included details about the drinking habits of Congressmen. In denying that he had used prohibition agents to spy on Congressmen, Doran claimed that when Capital bootlegger, George L. Cassidy, was apprehended, the agents had been sent to the Senate Office Building at the request of Curtis. Curtis admitted this to be true, saying that he had understood that he had the complete cooperation of other officials involved. Curtis expressed puzzlement at being expected to make a statement concerning the incident.<sup>61</sup> But after the initial flurry of interest these controversies no longer warranted inclusion in the news, and Curtis seemed to have vindicated himself to the satisfaction of most observers.

There were several other instances when Curtis, acting in a governmental capacity, was deemed worthy of mention in the newspapers. He adjourned the fourth Pan-American Commercial Congress sine die after the delegates from twenty-one republics had signed an act embodying conclusions of the meeting. Curtis congratulated the Congress and said loyalty to the common good would rout the economic peril present in the world at that time.<sup>62</sup> Curtis received Marshall Petain, chief of the French delegation to the

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<sup>61</sup>The New York Times, November 1, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup>The New York Times, October 14, 1931, p. 12.



Yorktown sesquicentennial celebration. They went from Curtis's office to the National Cemetery to place a wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier. Then Henry Stimson took over entertaining the French delegate.<sup>63</sup> In the same month Curtis received Premier Laval of France in his office in the Senate Office Building after there had been some confusion in finding just where Curtis was.<sup>64</sup> It was recorded that Curtis broke a 10-10 committee tie on a minor amendment to the home loan banking bill. "With a chuckle and amid smiles," Curtis rose and cast an affirmative vote.<sup>65</sup> As presiding officer Curtis granted Ferdinand Pecora, counsel to the Senate subcommittee on banking and currency which was investigating the stock market, special power to examine under oath all witnesses summoned for private examination and making attendance by witnesses mandatory.<sup>66</sup> Other than these minor official actions by Curtis his main newsworthy actions while Vice President occurred in the social and political spheres.

Before his election as Vice President Curtis had resided in a modest residential section of Washington. However,

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<sup>63</sup>The New York Times, October 22, 1931, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup>The New York Times, October 24, 1931, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup>The New York Times, July 13, 1932, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup>The New York Times, February 3, 1933, p. 9.

after his inauguration he resided in the imperial suite--or as it was of course called then, the Vice-Presidential suite--of the fashionable Mayflower Hotel. The apartment consisted of ten rooms facing on Connecticut avenue and was the largest in the hotel. Dolly Gann and her husband were to live there also and she was to be his official hostess.<sup>67</sup> A Girard, Kansas, publisher, E. Haldeman-Julius, demanded to know what connection Curtis had with a certain Mr. Moore and a \$100,000,000 bond deal and whether that deal had anything to do with the Vice-Presidential suite. Curtis denied knowing any Mr. Moore and asserted emphatically that what he paid for his apartment was no one's business. It was strictly a matter between himself and the hotel.<sup>68</sup> The Willard Hotel revealed that Curtis had turned down a similar offer of a royal suite in that establishment. The story around Washington was that Curtis was allowed to stay in the Mayflower suite without charge. The regular rent for the suite was set at \$25,000 per year; however, it was calculated by reporters that the suite actually yielded only about \$7,500 per year because it was seldom used. They speculated that this was about what Curtis was paying for

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<sup>67</sup>The New York Times, January 18, 1929, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup>The New York Times, June 26, 1931, p. 17.



the apartment, but they never found out for certain.<sup>69</sup> Mrs. John Brooks Henderson, widow of a Senator, thought that, in view of the entertaining the Vice President was expected to do, the Vice President should have an official residence, a little White House one might say. She had offered a house to Coolidge when he was Vice President, but he rejected the idea. She renewed the offer during the tenure of Curtis and a Congressional committee considered the proposal. Dolly Gann recorded that she had approved of the residence when it was shown to her. Subsequently the matter was dropped when a member of the Henderson family objected to the contemplated transfer.<sup>70</sup>

The social duties of the Vice President were more exacting than his Constitutional duties. Custom prevented the President from dining out; therefore, it fell the lot of Curtis to be the official diner for the administration, and "his working clothes are broadcloth, starched shirt and white tie." When the caterers wagon, the florists truck, and a car bearing the seal of the Vice President were all seen in front of a Washington home, it was certain that the society column of next morning would begin: "The Vice

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<sup>69</sup>American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 406-407.

<sup>70</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 192; Williamson, The New York Times, March 15, 1931, sec. V, p. 6.

President and Mrs. Gann were guests in whose honor. . ."<sup>71</sup>  
 The Vice President served more often as a guest than as a host. However, the dinners he was expected to give were rigidly prescribed by precedent. These were expected to be notable both in terms of personnel and entertainment provided. However, the Vice President was not expected to return all the invitations that he accepted. The first stop for the Vice President in each new social year of Washington society was a dinner given in his honor by President Hoover.<sup>72</sup> Throughout the official social season the name of the Vice President was prominent in the society columns as the guest of honor at numerous functions.<sup>73</sup>  
 Dolly Gann, who made no pretense of disliking the social demands of the Vice Presidency, put it this way:

So it went with the Vice President and his official hostess--one dinner after another. And in the daytime hours, when we could not give or go to dinners, there were less formal affairs without number. We had no days or nights of leisure.<sup>74</sup>

The distinctive feature of the dinners given by Curtis was the use of movies for entertainment at the more

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<sup>71</sup>Williamson, The New York Times, March 15, 1931, sec. V, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 124-126 & 142.

<sup>73</sup>See "Curtis, Charles," The New York Times Index, 1929-1933.

<sup>74</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 137-138.



important of these functions. At the second and the fourth annual dinners given in honor of the Hoovers movies were shown.<sup>75</sup> The movie The Virginian was shown at an official dinner for Sir Esme Howard, the British Ambassador, and Lady Isabella, which <sup>Mrs.</sup>Gann believed to be one of the first, perhaps the first, sound movie ever shown outside a theater. It was also noted that music was furnished by a section of the Marine band.<sup>76</sup> Capital social life then was expected to take up a major portion of Curtis's time, and it was that aspect of his life that embroiled him in a controversial incident that was given more space in print than any other single incident during the time he was Vice President.

A dispute concerning the place of Dolly Gann, official hostess of Curtis, arose early in the Hoover administration. The first indication that Washington society would not readily accept Dolly as equal in status to the wife of a Vice President came when the "Ladies of the Senate," a club of Senators wives, refused to honor the pretenses of <sup>Mrs.</sup>Gann to the Presidency of that group under the provision of the club constitution which stated that the wife of the Vice President should be president of the club. They elected

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-133. See also The New York Times, December 10, 1930, p. 22; December 14, 1932, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 136; The New York Times, January 5, 1930, sec. II, p. 8.

instead Mrs. George H. Moses, wife of the President pro tempore of the Senate. However, the speculation by reporters that <sup>Mrs.</sup> Gann would abandon her intention of serving as official hostess to the Vice President proved to be unfounded.<sup>77</sup>

But it was the dispute concerning the seating rank to be accorded Dolly at the dinners of Washington society that occupied the wagging tongues of the capital city and reaped not a little ridicule and laughter at the expense of the Vice President and his family. Even though Dolly had been acting as the official hostess for Curtis since his inauguration, the State Department announced late in March, 1929, that in accordance with a ruling made by out-going Secretary of State Kellogg, Mrs. Gann would be seated below ambassador's wives instead of second only to Mrs. Hoover as she had expected to do as the official hostess of the second highest ranking elected official in the United States.<sup>78</sup> Curtis made a formal protest to the newly appointed Secretary of State, Henry L. Stimson.<sup>79</sup> Washington hostesses took the controversy very seriously.<sup>80</sup> As long as the dispute stood

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<sup>77</sup>The New York Times, February 3, 1929, p. 1; February 6, 1929, p. 11.

<sup>78</sup>The New York Times, March 30, 1929, p. 19. including

<sup>79</sup>The New York Times, April 4, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup>Editorial, The New York Times, April 4, 1929, p. 26.



unsettled they could not invite both Curtis and members of the diplomatic corps to the same dinner. The State Department withheld its decision for some time, and members of its protocol division were forbidden to discuss the matter with anyone. It was generally believed that Stimson would find it politically inexpedient to reverse the Kellogg ruling. In the meantime, Curtis also could not be invited to dinners held by the diplomatic corps where he had always been a favorite guest.<sup>81</sup> There were many ready to offer sarcastic advice. Senator Norris wrote Mr. Stimson a letter in which he suggested that if Stimson could not settle the matter quickly he should ask Hoover to refer the matter to the World Court so the State Department could return to considering world affairs almost as pressing as a dispute over social rank.<sup>82</sup> The diplomatic corps met at the call of the dean of the diplomatic corps, Sir Esme Howard, and it was decided that the settlement of the dispute should be left to the State Department. Just before the diplomatic corps met, Senator Heflin of Alabama threatened that if the Gann

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<sup>81</sup>The New York Times, April 5, 1929; April 7, 1929, sec. III, p. 1. <sup>P4</sup>

<sup>82</sup>The New York Times, April 7, 1929, p. 15, including the text of the letter.

seating dispute was not settled "in the way Charley wants it" before Congress opened, he would introduce a joint resolution to define her status legally. "Charley Curtis is right in this matter," Heflin said as he pulled back the side of his cream-colored pongee coat and put his hand into his pocket over which hung a large watch fob. "This is a serious issue, boys," Heflin commented sagely, "and if it is not settled, this country is gone." It was reported that politics almost adjourned in the early days of April, 1929, as all of Washington discussed the place of Dolly in Washington society.<sup>83</sup>

The entire dispute was resolved rather suddenly, and Dolly was able to sit at the dinner table in Washington once again. The State Department issued a statement that it would not arbitrate questions of social precedence in the future. Secretary Stimson wrote letters to Curtis and Ambassador Howard, stating that Kellogg had stated precedent properly but had not intended to make a ruling. Then Stimson washed his hands of the entire Gann precedence dispute, leaving the settlement of the dispute up to the diplomatic corps.<sup>84</sup> One editorial writer saw another

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<sup>83</sup>The New York Times, April 9, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup>The New York Times, April 10, 1929, p. 1. See also p. 4, which includes the texts of the letters sent to Curtis and Howard by Stimson. Also notes that the Vice President



humorous angle to the entire dispute: What would happen if E. E. Gann selected an official hostess and asked the State Department where he was to be seated?<sup>85</sup> Even though it was to remain a topic of conversation for some time, the dispute was for all practical purposes ended when the diplomatic corps met and decided that until some constituted authority in the United States should rule on the matter, Mrs. Gann would be accorded the respect that she desired. Inasmuch as there was no constituted authority which was likely to take up the question, this was actually a final decision.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, as long as Mrs. Hoover stayed at home, Dolly outranked every other lady in the United States at society functions.<sup>87</sup> The affair was deemed to be closed when Dolly attended a dinner at the Chilean Embassy and was accorded

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of the United States was involved in a precedence dispute in 1893 when the U. S. and Great Britain simultaneously raised the rank of the envoys they exchanged from minister to ambassador. The British Ambassador, Lord Pauncefoot, insisted that he be seated above the Vice President because the Ambassador represented the person of the Monarch. The Ambassador acquiesced to the American contentions when someone likened Vice-President Adlai E. Stevenson to the Prince of Wales.

<sup>85</sup> Editorial, The New York Times, April 10, 1929, p. 28.

<sup>86</sup> The New York Times, April 11, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> Editorial, The New York Times, April 11, 1929, p. 28.

the same rank as her brother.<sup>88</sup> A corollary social dispute that made the rounds of gossip in Washington was the alleged social dispute between Mrs. Gann and Alice Roosevelt Longworth, wife of the Speaker of the House. Evidently this was the result of a claim by Speaker Nicholas Longworth that he should be accorded a higher social rank than the Vice President, but he made no formal protest and evidently no actual bad feelings existed between Mrs. Gann and Mrs. Longworth. Mrs. Gann summed up the social question as a "tempest in a teapot."<sup>89</sup> Through the remainder of Curtis's term Mrs. Gann held her position at the head of the table, and it was noted in most instances that Mr. Gann shared the spot.

The Vice Presidency was an anti-climatic and disappointing time in Curtis's life in terms of politics. As the mid-term elections of 1930 approached the Democrats were happily predicting that they would win a resounding victory at the polls. Curtis publicly denounced such reports just

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<sup>88</sup>The New York Times, April 12, 1929, p. 1; April 13, 1929, p. 9. One entire article, "Making Washington Safe for Diplomacy," The Literary Digest, CI (April 27, 1929), 32-47, was devoted to the social dispute and included much material quoted from various newspapers. Other commentary appears in American Mercury, XVII (August, 1929), 404, and in Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 111-118.

<sup>89</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 111-118.



as one would expect a loyal party regular to do.<sup>90</sup> If he had private reservations contrary to his outward optimism, he did not publish them. Curtis went home to Topeka to cast his ballot, and when the Republicans suffered the defeat predicted by their adversaries, Curtis expressed surprise, but saw a beneficial result in the Democratic victory. He said the Republicans would be spurred on to such efforts in 1932 that the Grand Old Party would be unbestable.<sup>91</sup> But there was much evidence that Curtis did not view the chances of his party in general, and his own chances in particular, with complete confidence.

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<sup>90</sup>The New York Times, October 14, 1929, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup>The New York Times, October 14, 1930, p. 3; November 5, 1930, p. 1 & *passim*, reported the election results; November 6, 1930, p. 3; Editorial, November 15, 1930, p. 16. In another instance his party regularity caused Curtis (and other prominent Republicans as well) to appear rather ridiculous. The editors of a humor column in a student newspaper, The Cornell Daily Sun, wrote letters to Republican leaders that told of a dinner to be held in honor of the sesquicentennial of the birth of Hugo N. Frye (You-go-and-fry), a patriot who had long been denied the recognition due to him for his part in organizing the Republican party in New York State. Curtis wired in reply: "I congratulate the Republicans on paying this respect to the memory of Hugo N. Frye and wish you a most successful occasion." Fortunately, Curtis's reply was rather cautious in comparison to the messages sent by some Republicans. Curtis joined with the Senate in "uproarious" laughter as a Democratic Senator read accounts of the hoax on the floor of the Senate. The New York Times, May 28, 1930, p. 5; May 29, 1930, p. 2; Editorial, May 29, 1930, p. 22.



During the months of April through November of 1931, there was constant speculation whether Curtis would seek renomination for the Vice Presidency. And right through the Republican National Convention of 1932 there was a definite movement to dislodge Curtis from his place on the Hoover ticket. During the last two days of March, 1931, Curtis held conferences with Hoover, and when he emerged, he stated that he would not know what office he would be a candidate for in 1932 until some time after his visit to Kansas in June, 1931. But he did intimate that Hoover left the decision mostly to his own judgment.<sup>92</sup> From that time through November, 1931, there was a running stream of speculation in the newspapers concerned with his political future. It was generally predicted that Curtis would seek to regain his seat in the Senate.<sup>93</sup> Throughout those months he quashed all rumors that he had made a decision to pursue either course. He also denied that he would become a "czar" to the oil industry, holding a job similar to that of the Commissioner of Baseball. He repeatedly said that no one would

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<sup>92</sup>The New York Times, March 31, 1931, p. 5; April 1, 1932, p. 17.

<sup>93</sup>W. G. Clugston, "Kansas Speculates on Curtis's Future," The New York Times, May 10, 1931, sec. III, p. 5; W. G. Clugston, "Kansas Speculate on Next Campaign," The New York Times, June 21, 1931, sec. III, p. 6; The New York Times, June 21, 1931, sec. III, p. 1; July 3, 1931, p. 4; July 14, 1931, p. 39.



know for certain what his course would be until he made the announcement himself.<sup>94</sup>

In making the decision concerning the office he would choose to seek Curtis encountered a complex maze of factors to consider. Inasmuch as it was generally believed that Curtis and his family had enjoyed the Vice Presidential position, the mere rumor that Curtis was considering running for the Senate was interpreted to mean that he thought poorly of the chances of Hoover in the election of 1932. However, it was also said that this argument was not necessarily valid because there was danger that Curtis would be defeated should he run for the Senate.<sup>95</sup> Several reasons were advanced to explain the waning popularity of Curtis in Kansas. Firstly, the Sunflower State was in a state of political flux as evidenced by the gubernatorial campaign of 1930 when the voters flocked to the polls in support of "Dr." John Romulus Brinkley and nearly elected the goat-gland quack. The discontent of the state was most in evidence among farmers. Secondly, it was said that the younger generation

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<sup>94</sup>Clugston, The New York Times, June 21, 1931, sec. III, p. 6; The New York Times, July 3, 1931, p. 4; July 14, 1931, p. 39; July 18, 1931, p. 2; October 25, 1931, p. 5; November 25, 1931, p. 1.

<sup>95</sup>Clugston, The New York Times, May 10, 1931, sec. III, p. 5; Editorial, The New York Times, May 8, 1931, p. 24; July 16, 1931, p. 20; Editorial, December 1, 1931, p. 26.

of Republicans in Kansas were inclined to believe that Curtis had been the favorite son of that State long enough. Thirdly, it was known that many of Curtis's former advocates still bore a grudge because he had not resigned from the Senate immediately after his election to the Vice Presidency so that it was not possible to block the appointment of Henry J. Allen to the Senate. In addition to the speculation that Curtis could foresee the defeat of Hoover in 1932, it was also said that he was considering running for the Senate because of a personality clash between Hoover and Curtis. It was also mentioned that Curtis longed for the old position of power that he had enjoyed as a Senator.<sup>96</sup> Curtis had to consider also whether or not those who predicted that he would be defeated if he ran for the Senate were merely trying to get him out of the Kansas race. This idea had to be considered also when Kansas politicians advised him that abandoning the national ticket would appear to be a forecast of defeat for Hoover.<sup>97</sup> Curtis ended the speculation when he announced at the end of November, 1931, that he would seek renomination as the Republican Vice

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<sup>96</sup>Clugston, The New York Times, May 10, 1931, sec. III, p. 5.

<sup>97</sup>Clugston, The New York Times, June 21, 1931, sec. III, p. 6.



Presidential candidate.<sup>98</sup> It was reported that Republicans interpreted the announcement by Curtis to mean that he believed Hoover would win in 1932; the Democrats interpreted the decision to mean that Kansas was in full revolt against the Republicans and Curtis had chosen to be defeated as a candidate for the Vice Presidency rather than be defeated as a candidate for a Senatorial seat.<sup>99</sup> Normally such an announcement by a Republican Vice President would have been tantamount to renomination, but Curtis was faced with real opposition from within his own party.

Even before Curtis had made his decision to seek renomination, sporadic booms for other candidates cropped out, and the advisability of renomination was discussed at length. Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley was brought forward as a possible candidate for the Vice Presidency. In October, 1931, T. R. Roosevelt predicted that Hurley would be the next Vice President. While Hurley did not say that he would not accept the nomination if it were thrust at him, he did publicly announce on several occasions that he supported Curtis just as he had in 1924 and in 1928.<sup>100</sup> Dawes

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<sup>98</sup>The New York Times, December 1, 1931, p. 1; January 26, 1932, p. 1. See also Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 196-197, for a slightly different slant on the decision.

<sup>99</sup>The New York Times, December 1, 1931, p. 1.

<sup>100</sup>The New York Times, August 5, 1931, p. 2; October 28, 1931, p. 3; October 30, 1931, p. 1; April 25, 1931, p. 4.

told those booming his name for the Vice Presidential nomination that he was out of politics and intended to stay out.<sup>101</sup> Even though talk of denying Curtis renomination went on for over six months before the national convention, it was also generally held that Hoover supported the renomination of Curtis. However, it was said that among Hoover's friends there was a determined effort to dislodge Curtis. This movement which sought to provide a candidate for Vice President who would placate the progressive wing of the Republican party to whom neither Hoover nor Curtis was particularly attractive was allegedly led by Postmaster General Walter F. Brown. The names of both Senator Peter Norbeck of South Dakota and Senator L. J. Dickinson of Iowa were advanced as possible progressive candidates.<sup>102</sup> As the convention opened Secretary of the Treasury Ogden L. Mills who was considered to be close to Hoover eliminated himself from contention by endorsing the renomination of Curtis. Despite his previous statements the name of Dawes continued to make the rounds at that time.<sup>103</sup> There was even talk of drafting Coolidge as a Vice Presidential candidate, but most observers

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<sup>101</sup>The New York Times, November 28, 1931, p. 4;  
November 29, 1931, p. 24.

<sup>102</sup>The New York Times, April 9, 1932, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup>The New York Times, June 13, 1932, p. 11.



doubted that Coolidge would accept if asked.<sup>104</sup> In addition to the obvious utility of adding a Western progressive to the ticket, other reasons for eliminating Curtis were advanced. Dolly Gann said that her brother's steadfast support of prohibition made him the target of a group who came to the convention with little else on their minds except resubmission.<sup>105</sup> One prominent commentator on the American political scene had this to say:

There are some troubled consciences when the name of Vice-President Curtis is mentioned. As rational men the delegates I have talked with admit that the chief reason for having a Vice-President is that there should be a man ready to replace the President. They realize that Mr. Curtis is fourteen years older than Mr. Hoover, and it is not claimed, I believe, by any one, unless it be Mrs. Gann, that Mr. Curtis even in his palmy days was any wonder. They realize that his accession to the Presidency during the next four years would probably necessitate something like a regency, for he was never fit for the office and time is not adding to his qualifications.

Yet they cannot think of anybody to put in his place. For the eminent old men are not available and the more distinguished younger men are either too ambitious or too little known. The great charm of Mr. Curtis is that by renominating him nobody's feelings will be hurt. If he is renominated that will be the reason why.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>W. A. Warn, "Leaders at Chicago for Dropping Curtis," The New York Times, June 10, 1932, p. 11; The New York Times, June 11, 1932, p. 2.

<sup>105</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 195-196.

<sup>106</sup>Walter Lippman, Interpretations, 1931-1932 (ed. Allan Nevins; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), pp. 288-289. Editorial, The New York Times, June 15, 1932,

Regardless of whether or not he was correct in evaluating the motivation for the anti-Curtis movement, Lippman did advance the really valid reason that such a movement should exist.

The consensus of opinion at the Republican national convention opened in June, 1932, was that Curtis would be renominated. However, there was an unmistakable air of revolt around the convention in reference to the selection of Hoover's running mate. Curtis did not attend the convention; but Dolly was on hand and working devotedly for the nomination of "Brother." Hoover and his cohorts remained largely aloof from the selection of a Vice-Presidential candidate. At first there was no open break with Curtis, but it was reported that at the same time only the Kansas delegation was solidly for Curtis. It was particularly obvious that the Far West was not satisfied with Curtis. The name most often advanced by the Curtis opposition was that of General Dawes.<sup>107</sup> Texas made the first open break,

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p. 18, questions the advanced age of Curtis as a valid reason for dropping him from the ticket by citing examples of men of advanced age who came to positions of power and performed adequately.

<sup>107</sup>Warn, The New York Times, June 10, 1932, p. 1; W. A. Warn, "Prohibition Lines Are Drawn by Republicans Gathering at Chicago; Fight Over the Vice Presidency Looms," The New York Times, June 12, 1932, pp. 1 & 22; L. C. Speers, "Hoover Is Pictured As Curtis's One Hope," The New York



voting on June 13 to support Dawes even though Dawes had asked not to be a candidate. The Dawes movement began to gather momentum rapidly. It was estimated by the National Committeeman from Texas, R. B. Creager, that twenty-four states were ready to vote for Dawes and six states were in doubt just before the boom ended. Dawes was responsible for bursting the bubble when he flatly stated that he would not accept the nomination. There was still much opposition to Curtis which would have crystallized around some other candidate if one of the vote-getting ability of Dawes could have been found. Instead, a number of favorite son candidates were advanced. The anti-Curtis element continued its fight to the last but could not concentrate on one candidate, and the backbone of their opposition was broken.<sup>108</sup> Warnings by prohibition forces that their support would be withdrawn if Curtis were dropped from the ticket may have influenced many at the convention who were conscious of the pressures

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Times, June 15, 1932, pp. 1 & 14; The New York Times, June 11, 1932, p. 2; June 13, 1932, p. 11; June 14, 1932, p. 16; Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 197-202.

<sup>108</sup>L. C. Speers, "Dawes 'No' Crushes Anti-Curtis Drive," The New York Times, June 16, 1932, pp. 1 & 12; L. C. Speers, "Curtis Victory Won Against Field of 12," The New York Times, June 17, 1932, p. 1; The New York Times, June 14, 1932, p. 14; June 16, 1932, p. 12; Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 199-202.

of dry forces which were then yet prominent in certain sections of the country.<sup>109</sup>

Curtis was renominated on the first ballot, but not without considerable opposition. Five other candidates were put into nomination besides Curtis. And on the first roll call twelve candidates besides Curtis received votes. At the end of the roll call Curtis was some nineteen votes short of the necessary majority. However, Pennsylvania shifted its seventy-five votes to Curtis before the official vote was announced; Creager, engineer of the Dawes boom, moved that the nomination be made unanimous. The press reported that Dolly Gann, who had fought for Curtis right up to the last, was tired but happy.<sup>110</sup>

It was reported that Republicans leaving the convention were still discussing the renomination battle. There was a great deal of criticism in reference to the handling of the entire Vice Presidential nomination. It was heard that some of Hoover's supporters who had worked against Curtis initially then switched to his support had done so under orders from Washington. It was alleged that there had been a plan to put the name of Bertrand H. Snell into

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<sup>109</sup>The New York Times, June 11, 1932, p. 2; June 15, 1932, p. 14.

<sup>110</sup>Speers, The New York Times, June 17, 1932, p. 1; Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, p. 202.



nomination along with all the others in order that enough votes could have been drawn from Curtis to block his nomination. It was learned that the administration group campaigning against Curtis would have supported the nomination of Mills, the only speaker who had been able to quiet the "wet" galleries while speaking against resubmission. However, Mills had been emphatic in declaring that no member of the cabinet could conspire against the Vice President.<sup>111</sup> But Hoover and Curtis were soon to show differences of opinion on the issue that had taken up more of the energy of the convention with the possible exception of the choosing of a Vice-Presidential candidate.

Curtis attended the opening of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles as the personal representative of Hoover who sent his regrets,<sup>112</sup> but during the month following Curtis came out in opposition to Hoover on the question of prohibition. Speaking in Topeka at the official notification of

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<sup>111</sup>James A. Haggerty, "Board Will Control Hoover's Campaign," The New York Times, June 18, 1932, p. 3. Even though emphasis has been placed upon the opposition that Curtis encountered, it should be obvious that he commanded the support of a large block of delegates. Prior to the convention several delegations had gone on record in favor of Curtis. For example, see The New York Times, March 6, 1932, p. 16; March 13, 1932, p. 24; April 28, 1932, p. 2; May 4, 1932, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup>The New York Times, July 20, 1932, p. 3; July 30, 1932, p. 14; July 31, 1932, p. 1.



his nomination, Curtis expressed views that were termed to be as dry as Hoover's had been wet. The Democrats criticized the Republican candidates for what James Farley, Democratic National Chairman, summed up thusly: "It looks as though the Republican ticket had a half-dry head and a dried-out tail." Special criticism was leveled at the Republicans for not including New York and Chicago, notorious centers of wet sentiment, in the chain of cities receiving radio coverage of Curtis's acceptance. The Republicans appeared to be at a disadvantage in explaining why that omission had occurred. Generally, one could say that both Hoover and Curtis had remained true to the vague plank in the Republican platform that asserted that the voters should make a decision on prohibition. Hoover was certain that a change in the law would be called for; Curtis was certain the law would stand.<sup>113</sup>

Political observers predicted that the stand Curtis took on prohibition would result in his campaign speaking schedule being curtailed. Curtis had been speaking rather frequently since the summer of 1930. It is not certain just what effect his dry speech may have had upon Republican strategy, but Curtis was assigned to a heavy schedule of

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<sup>113</sup>The New York Times, July 20, 1932, p. 3; August 18, 1932, p. 2; August 19, 1932, pp. 1 & 6; August 20, 1932, p. 5; Editorial, August 20, 1932, p. 12.



pre-election speeches in the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Oklahoma, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Montana, and Washington.<sup>114</sup> In addition, he spoke in Iowa and Pennsylvania,<sup>115</sup> and he closed out his campaign activity with a hurried round of appearances in South-Central Kansas.<sup>116</sup>

Even Dolly Gann was pressed into campaign service for the Republican cause. Her principal purpose was to attract the women voters to the Republican Party through a number of appearances before women's groups.<sup>117</sup> One writer asserted that the Vice Presidential candidates were to figure heavily in the campaign despite the fact that the Vice President would have little more opportunity to affect legislation than the average citizen.<sup>118</sup> The views of the candidates for Vice President were taken seriously. Furthermore, a survey of Curtis's campaign and pre-campaign utterances would be instructive in ascertaining what Curtis as Vice

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<sup>114</sup>The New York Times, September 17, 1932, p. 3; September 25, 1932, p. 31.

<sup>115</sup>The New York Times, September 4, 1932, p. 12; September 18, 1932, p. 1; October 10, 1932, p. 26.

<sup>116</sup>The New York Times, November 8, 1932, p. 16. It is apparent that Curtis was carefully steered away from metropolitan areas during the campaign.

<sup>117</sup>Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 206-218.

<sup>118</sup>Editorial, The New York Times, August 21, 1932, sec. II, p. 1.

President of the United States believed to be the real issues of the day.

Curtis's speeches were quite repetitive. He had a small number of favorite topics that he included in almost every speech in one manner or another. This was partly conditioned by the nature of the audiences he faced. For example, his references to the farm problem in almost every speech is easily understood in view of an itinerary that put him before rural audiences on nearly every occasion. His choice of topic was also conditioned by the times: he could hardly avoid discussing the depression. However, his proposals for solving the problems of the day fell into a pattern, so much so in fact that he sometimes repeated entire phrases, sentences, or even paragraphs almost verbatim in his series of speeches. It would seem possible then to summarize the Curtis speeches of the latter part of his term as Vice President, particularly the speeches of the 1932 national campaign.

Curtis made references to prohibition on occasion. He was endorsed by dry organizations as having the proper view toward the prohibition question.<sup>119</sup> Curtis refused to elaborate on the stand he took in his acceptance

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<sup>119</sup>See for example, The New York Times, August 25, 1932, p. 9; Editorial, August 25, 1932, p. 18.



speech,<sup>120</sup> but he said that he did not believe that his position conflicted with the Republican platform. He said also that he did not believe that his position on prohibition had hurt Hoover's chances.<sup>121</sup> But his views were disquieting to some Republicans. Curtis was slated to open the Republican campaign in Pennsylvania where there was considerable wet sentiment. State Republican leaders discussed obtaining another speaker, but they decided that to drop Curtis on such short notice would be openly discourteous. However, it was duly reported that when Curtis spoke in Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, he did not mention the subject of prohibition. Evidently that was the way Curtis and Pennsylvania were made compatible on the subject of prohibition.<sup>122</sup> When Curtis did mention prohibition it was through allusions in the form of pleas for support of the Constitution, for observance of law, and for respect for the courts. He usually called for the deportation of alien criminals and racketeers as a corollary to his statements on behalf of the Constitution, flag, law, courts, and country. He was particularly certain to stress deportation of undesirable

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<sup>120</sup>The New York Times, August 21, 1932, p. 19.

<sup>121</sup>The New York Times, August 29, 1932, p. 8.

<sup>122</sup>The New York Times, September 4, 1932, p. 12; September 18, 1932, pp. 1 & 29.



aliens when speaking before supernationalism groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution. The following is an example of his allusions to prohibition:

What we need more than ever is reverence for the Constitution and respect for the courts of the country. It is not pleasing to note the wave that is sweeping over the country which disregards law and order and the Constitution, and substitutes man's desires, and weakens opinion of law.

To determine the extent to which legislation is beneficial and beyond which it is hurtful is a province of statesmanship. Good laws are the result of the application of common sense and sound judgment to immutable principles. While people may differ as to the wisdom of the enactment of a particular piece of legislation, or to the amending of the Constitution in regard thereto, it is impossible to ignore the Constitution and unthinkable to evade it by administrative policy, either national or state.<sup>123</sup>

This speech with its veiled references was delivered in 1930 and was actually more explicit than the speeches he made during the 1932 campaign that contained the same train of thought. Most of the speeches similar to that above were delivered in the year 1931.<sup>124</sup> He apparently avoided the issue when possible during the campaign. One can assume that Curtis's demands for the deportation of aliens was

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<sup>123</sup>The New York Times, July 5, 1930, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup>The New York Times, May 31, 1931, p. 1; July 5, 1931, p. 19; July 21, 1931, p. 19; August 25, 1931, p. 12; November 12, 1931, p. 15; April 19, 1932, p. 15. See also The New York Times, September 24, 1932, p. 32; October 1, 1932, p. 3.



doubly popular at a time when the country was gripped by depression and suffering from unemployment.

Curtis had a stock of standard statements about the depression that appeared in most of his speeches. He seemed to view the depression as a natural occurrence, saying that every boom period accompanied by over-speculation had been followed by a depression. Furthermore, he would always point out that after each depression the country had advanced and prospered in an unprecedented way. Several times he called for speculators to stop hoarding money that should be in circulation. Curtis lauded Hoover as having done more than any other President in history to stop a panic. His speeches were studded with calls to the people for united and non-partisan efforts that would lead to a restoration of confidence. Curtis said that the United States was the last country to enter the depression and would be the first to recover. He extended his sympathies to other nations of the world suffering from economic depression, but he said that this nation would have to accomplish its own recovery before attempting to help other nations. This was a reference to war debt cancellation which he openly opposed. Curtis assured his audiences that Hoover's moratorium on war debt payments was not an initial step toward cancellation. He repeatedly said that practically every depression occurred when the Democratic party was in power. He hinted



that the depression would have been shorter and less severe if the Democrats had not hindered the restoration of confidence by making political use of the nation's economic distress. He asserted that the depression was nearly over in 1932 and that prosperity would soon return. Curtis repeatedly praised the Reconstruction Finance Corporation which he said had helped save the smaller banks most in need of help. He assured listeners that the RFC was a temporary expedient that would soon be discontinued as prosperity returned. On the other hand Curtis criticized the Federal Reserve System on the grounds that it drained money away from rural areas to urban centers where it entered speculative channels. In contrast he said that seventy-six per cent of the relief by the RFC had gone to cities of less than 10,000 population.<sup>125</sup>

In terms of the farm problem Curtis also had a set pattern. With few exceptions he tied the salvation of the

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<sup>125</sup>The New York Times, March 20, 1932, p. 27; April 17, 1932, p. 27; June 5, 1930, p. 5; August 20, 1932, p. 19; September 23, 1932, p. 10; September 24, 1932, p. 32; September 25, 1932, p. 30; September 27, 1932, p. 7; September 28, p. 11; September 30, 1932, p. 10; October 1, 1932, p. 3; October 7, 1932, p. 16. See also The New York Times, November 14, 1930, p. 6; October 11, 1930, p. 4; October 18, 1930, p. 2; October 22, 1930, p. 16; November 6, 1930, p. 3; November 14, 1930, p. 6; July 5, 1931, p. 19; July 18, 1931, p. 2; November 29, 1931, p. 4; December 29, 1931, p. 3; December 30, 1931, p. 1; Editorial, December 30, 1931, p. 18.



farmer to one of his pet avocations, the venerable protective tariff. Of course, Curtis ridiculed Roosevelt's six-point agricultural program. He blamed the plight of the farmer on the administration of Wilson. Curtis claimed the farmer whose surplus problem after World War I was the result of expansion in response to war demands was rewarded by an unreasonable deflation by the Federal Reserve System upon the order of President Wilson who acted upon the advice of William Gibbs McAdoo and other Democrats. Therefore, Curtis argued that the charge made by Roosevelt that the farm depression began in 1921 under President Harding was false.<sup>126</sup> He pointed with pride to the fact that one of the first legislative enactments of the Harding administration was the Emergency Tariff Act, followed by the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act, and later the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, all of which included protection on farm products. Curtis proudly claimed that he helped effect the enactment of these farm tariff provisions, an indignant retort to Roosevelt's assertion that the Republican tariff was a fraud upon the American farmer.<sup>127</sup> He suggested several times during the campaign

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<sup>126</sup>The New York Times, September 18, 1932, pp. 1 & 29; October 11, 1932, p. 12; October 23, 1932, p. 26.

<sup>127</sup>The New York Times, September 18, 1932, p. 29; September 24, 1932, p. 32; September 30, 1932, p. 10; October 1, 1932, p. 3; October 6, 1932, p. 14; October 11, 1932, p. 12.



that the farmer would secure much relief if cooperative marketing agencies could be developed. He said that if organized properly such a plan would reduce the price spread between farm prices and food prices without injuring those who were fair in their dealings with farmers. However, he did not elaborate on the proper organization that would accomplish that goal.<sup>128</sup> Naturally Curtis defended the actions of the Hoover administration in reference to the farm problem, pointing out specifically that Hoover had ordered the Federal Land Banks to extend mortgages rather than foreclose mortgages and that seed and crop loans had been arranged.<sup>129</sup> The limit of Curtis's appeals in those desperate years was demonstrated when the Republicans failed to carry the agricultural state of Kansas, the home state of Curtis himself.

Curtis did not limit his defense of the tariff merely to the agricultural schedules. He denounced Roosevelt's demands for a revenue tariff. He said that a tariff for revenue would not help one farmer, laborer, mine, or factory in the United States. He claimed that Roosevelt was in

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<sup>128</sup>The New York Times, September 18, 1932, p. 1; September 24, 1932, p. 32. See also The New York Times, October 23, 1930, p. 11.

<sup>129</sup>The New York Times, October 11, 1932, p. 12; October 23, 1932, p. 26.



error in stating that the Fordney-McCumber tariff had been injurious to trade, and he took offense to the Democratic predictions that the Smoot-Hawley tariff would constrict the foreign trade of the United States. Curtis claimed that under the Fordney-McCumber tariff the exports of the United States had increased while imports had decreased. He denounced the Democrats as "spotted protectionists" and called for the election of Congressmen who believed in the "American system of protection."<sup>130</sup> The tariff was just one item of what Curtis felt to be "American."

As noted previously Curtis made various appeals to the super-nationalist groups of the United States with his advocacy of deportation of certain aliens, his references to the Constitution, flag, and law, and his opposition to aiding other depressed nations so long as the United States also had a depression. He also pleased the nationalists when he paid passing tribute to arbitration and the search for world peace while calling for strong armed forces so long as mutual reduction of armaments seemed unlikely. He emphasized the need for peace, but he asserted that it must be peace with honor and peace in keeping with the long-established

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<sup>130</sup>The New York Times, September 28, 1932, p. 11; November 8, 1932, p. 16. See also The New York Times, October 3, 1930, p. 6; October 9, 1930, p. 16; October 23, 1930, p. 11.



tradition of avoiding entangling alliances. In other words Curtis hoped for peace and the peaceful settlement of international disputes, but he was rather skeptical of the motives of other nations. His pronouncements in terms of world cooperation hearkened back to the days when he aided Henry Cabot Lodge in the fight against Wilson's League of Nations. Curtis said little about benefits for veterans which had become a hot issue after Hoover had dispersed the "Bonus Army" in 1932. Hecklers often interrupted Curtis's speeches with noisy comments about Hoover's expulsion of the veterans mob from Washington. Curtis always defended Hoover's actions, and Curtis himself had first employed troops against the bonus marchers before Hoover had done so. Curtis once called for two companies of Marines from the Washington Navy Yard to relieve the capitol police guard. The Marines were sent back when General Pelham D. Glassford, Superintendent of Police, assured Curtis that troops were not necessary.<sup>131</sup>

In his appeals for "Americanism" were included the usual praise for women, for mother, for families, for home,

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<sup>131</sup>The New York Times, February 29, 1932, p. 15; April 19, 1932, p. 15; November 12, 1932, p. 15; February 9, 1936, p. 32. See also The New York Times, July 5, 1930, p. 5; August 16, 1930, p. 7; May 31, 1931, p. 1; October 26, 1931, p. 5; November 12, 1931, p. 15; November 29, 1931, p. 4.



for separation of church and state, for education, for self reliance and most of the homely virtues an American politician finds it expedient to defend whether asked to or not.<sup>132</sup> His appeal to labor groups was limited to his advocacy of stricter immigration laws and a few minor comments concerning the need of a shorter work week. Curtis joined other Republicans in paying tribute to Secretary of Labor J. J. ("Jim the Puddler") Davis; Curtis credited Davis with obtaining for labor wages that were unapralleled in history.<sup>133</sup> Throughout the campaign he predicted that good times were on the way, and that the Republicans would win the election.<sup>134</sup>

The voters ended the career of holding public office for Curtis in the general election of November, 1932. He predicted a Republican victory even after the first returns on election day indicated a Democratic trend, and he expressed surprise at the final results. There was some speculation that Roosevelt would take over immediately. For example, it

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<sup>132</sup>See for example, The New York Times, July 5, 1930, p. 5; November 14, 1930, p. 6; April 21, 1931, p. 20; August 25, 1931, p. 17; February 21, 1932, p. 15; June 21, 1932, p. 16.

<sup>133</sup>The New York Times, August 24, 1932, p. 19; September 28, 1932, p. 11.

<sup>134</sup>The New York Times, August 20, 1932, p. 19; September 29, 1932, p. 10; October 24, 1932, p. 10.



was suggested that Hoover might appoint Roosevelt Secretary of State, then both the President and Vice President would resign. The press treated Curtis with kindness. One writer took an indulgent view of Curtis's surprise at the resounding defeat of the Republican party and asserted that it was certain that the Democrats would never be able to blame Curtis for having anything to do with bringing on the depression. It was admitted that Curtis made a valiant effort on behalf of the doomed cause of the Republican national ticket when he could easily have run for the Senate. Of course, it is impossible to even make an intelligent guess as to whether he could have won a senatorial election. One editorial suggests that Curtis could retire to private life with the satisfaction of contemplating John Nance Garner immersed in the dull task of presiding over the United States Senate.<sup>135</sup>

As a lame-duck Vice President, Curtis made news in his Constitutional capacity of presiding officer on one occasion. Men representing an organization called the Rank and File Veterans presented petitions to both houses of Congress to be read by the presiding officers. A small

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<sup>135</sup>The New York Times, November 9, 1932, p. 13; November 10, 1932, p. 1; November 11, 1932, p. 18; November 13, 1932, sec. VIII, p. 2; December 10, 1932, p. 14. See also Gann, Dolly Gann's Book, pp. 217-218 & 228-239.



group from the "bonus army" of about one-hundred was admitted to each House. The petition they presented asked for immediate payment of the adjusted compensation certificates, expounded the sufferings of former service men, and urged that disability payments not be reduced. Before Curtis would read the petition to the Senate he demanded that a portion censuring Hoover for the eviction of the bonus army from Washington during the previous summer be deleted. Samuel J. Stembler, leader of the radical group, refused and suggested that Curtis do it himself. Curtis struck out the paragraph and presented the petition. As the committee left one Negro delegate refused to shake hands with Curtis. Curtis retorted, "Well you can go to the devil!" Speaker of the House, Garner, accepted the petition without objection from James W. Ford, Negro vice-presidential candidate for the Communist party in the previous election.<sup>136</sup>

On March 4, 1933, Curtis retired from public office. On the eve of his retirement a silver tray was presented to him by the Senate which bore the inscribed facsimilies of the signatures of all the Senators. The next day he quietly administered the oath of office to Garner in a solemn ceremony. Garner seemed embarrassed by the solemnity after the contrasting congeniality of the House of Representatives

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<sup>136</sup>The New York Times, December 15, 1932, p. 2.



which Garner had adjourned sine die a short time before.<sup>137</sup> Although Curtis was out of office he chose to remain on the scene in Washington during his last years.

Curtis established his legal residence in Washington, D. C. He was admitted to the practice of law before the bar of the District of Columbia and opened law offices in Washington. It was said that his office became the rendezvous of politicians where the fine art of politics was the main topic of discussion.<sup>138</sup> In 1933 he was made president of the New Mexico Gold Producers Corporation, but it is doubtful that he was more than a figurehead for the mining company.<sup>139</sup> All of this was not easily understood by Kansans:

There were acts in the later life of the man Kansans had so honored which were somewhat puzzling to Kansans. His whole background was Kansas. The state

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<sup>137</sup>The New York Times, March 4, 1933, p. 2; March 5, 1933, p. 4; February 9, 1936, p. 32. The silver tray may be seen at "Old Kaw Indian Mission," State museum, Council Grove, Kansas.

<sup>138</sup>James C. Malin, Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), XXII, supplement 2, 136, hereafter cited as DAB; The New York Times, March 14, 1933, p. 20; April 27, 1933, p. 6; February 9, 1936, pp. 1 & 32. Young and Middleton, Heirs Apparent, p. 283, states that upon retirement Curtis returned to Topeka. If it is meant to be inferred that Curtis took up his residency in Topeka during the years 1933-1936, the authors are in error.

<sup>139</sup>The New York Times, June 4, 1933, p. 21; February 9, 1936, p. 32.



eventually gave him almost everything he asked for or even intimated he would like to have. It took pride in his accomplishments and in the honors bestowed upon him later by the entire nation when he was elected vice-president.

But Kansas and Kansans never could quite understand why, when he had reached the high office and finished with it, [h]e lost interest in Kansas; w[h]y he announced that thereafter his home would be in Washington; why he withdrew his holdings from the state of his birth and development. Another thing many Kansans never could fully understand was why he became the attorney for and defender of Dr. John R. Brinkley in the years when the state was trying to oust him from its confines.<sup>140</sup>

Even though Curtis no longer held office, he continued to be somewhat affluent in a political sense during the years 1933-1936. Upon retirement he became chairman of the National Republican League, an organization designed to work for the election of Republicans in the elections of 1934 and 1936. Later Curtis resigned and the organization became inactive. Of course, he was critical of the program of President Roosevelt; he usually based his criticism upon an appeal to preserve the Constitution. He stated that the Republicans were always careful to stay within the meaning of the Constitution, but others were not so cautious. He predicted victory for the Republicans in the Presidential election of 1936, and he confidently asserted that the

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<sup>140</sup>The Kansas City Star, February 8, 1936, Clipping file, William Allen White Library, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia.



Republicans had at least a dozen men who could defeat Roosevelt. However, he refused to name the men. He announced in 1935 that he would be active in the 1936 campaign but would not seek an office for himself. He advocated the nomination of Alf M. Landon as the Republican Presidential candidate as early as August, 1935. Late in the same year Curtis was chosen as chairman of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee and was expected to take an active part in the campaign for the election of Republicans to the Senate.<sup>141</sup> It required a much more final defeat than the mere loss of the election of 1932 to end Curtis's interest in politics and to remove his influence from the political fortunes of the Republican party.

On February 8, 1936, a maid found Curtis dead in bed at the home of Dolly Gann where Curtis had been residing since his retirement. The death of the seventy-six year old former Vice President was attributed to a heart attack. His body was returned to Topeka where the only Vice President to come from Kansas was buried not far from the spot where

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<sup>141</sup>The New York Times, February 6, 1933, p. 2; June 8, 1934, p. 2; Editorial, February 27, 1935, p. 18; May 31, 1935, p. 9; Editorial, July 1, 1935, p. 18; July 3, 1935, p. 2; Editorial, July 5, 1935, p. 12; Editorial, August 31, 1935, p. 12; December 8, 1935, p. 47; December 11, 1935, p. 5; Editorial, December 12, 1935, p. 24; February 9, 1936, pp. 1, 32, & 33.



he began his existence among the Indians. He had indeed risen high in the nation's esteem before coming to rest permanently in his home town.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>Melin, DAB, XXII, supplement 2, 136; The New York Times, February 9, 1936, pp. 1, 32, & 33.

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