

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

BUSTLE GOWNS PUZZLE CURATOR; WERE THEY POSTBELLUM THEATER COSTUMES, HE WONDERS

Curator Stuart Thayer is seeking more information about a collection of 30-35 nineteenth-century style dresses, some with bustles, in the WCHS collections.

They were received in 1941 and labeled "Douglas costumes" by then Curator Howell Taylor. The dresses are in good shape and appear to be machine made. Thayer wonders if they were postbellum theater costumes.

Marie Louise Douglas who lived at 502 E. Huron Street next to the First Baptist Church died March 20, 1941, at age 81 and may have been the donor. According to WCHS minutes in 1941, she willed her home to U-M

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

Dexter Historical Society — Museum open 1 to 3 p.m. Tuesdays in December, then closed January through March except by special appointment. Appointments may be made by telephoning 426-8972.

A Christmas Sing and visit from Santa was to be held at the museum Saturday, December 10.

Milan Historical Society — 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, December 21, at Milan Community House.

Saline Historical Society — Members and their families will have a caroling party at the Evangelical Home in Saline Saturday, December 17. They will gather first at the home of Marjorie and Don Shelton at 308 N. Ann Arbor St. at 2 p.m.

Ypsilanti Historical Society — Christmas party for members from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, December 11, at the museum. The museum is open to the public from 2 to 4 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays except the 11th.

regents for the use of WCHS but the regents refused it. It is now the American Baptist Student Center.

Her father was Dr. Silas H. Douglas, long prominent in Ann Arbor and University affairs.



HEARD ANY 'ROORBACKS?' DIRTY TRICKS NOT NEW

Heard any "roorbacks" lately? It's a rumor circulated on the eve of an election, too late to be countered, Prof. Slosson said. Most of them have little or no factual basis, he added.

The word originated in 1844 when something detrimental to Polk's campaign was published, purporting to be from *Roorback's Tour Through the Western and Southern States in 1836*.

Other words derived from surnames are "gerrymander," "boycott" and "lynch law," he noted.

STATE PRESIDENT TO TALK TO GENEALOGY GROUP HERE

Curtis Bradley of Grand Rapids, president of the Michigan Genealogical Council, will speak at the next meeting of the local Genealogy Group at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, January 22, at Washtenaw Community College. His topic will be "What Is A Certified Genealogist and How to Become One." Help session at 1 p.m.

SPEAKER PRESENTS GIFTS

Prof. Slosson, November speaker, gave the Society a copy of *The American Presidency* by Clinton Rossiter and the July 1976 *Harper's*. The latter features political essays from the magazine's past 126 years.

WCHS CHRISTMAS MEETING AT YPSILANTI HISTORICAL MUSEUM SUNDAY THE 18TH

Washtenaw County Historical Society will visit the Ypsilanti Historical Museum for an old-fashioned Christmas open house from 4 to 6 p.m. Sunday, December 18. It is at 220 N. Huron St.

The Ypsilanti Historical Society annually decorates the museum in the manner appropriate to the days when the large two-story brick home was occupied by prominent Ypsilanti families in the 1800's.

The house built in 1860 was later divided into eight apartments and finally was bought by the city. In the late 1960's the city turned it over to the Ypsilanti Historical Society for a museum. It opened in 1971.

WCHS visitors may tour the museum and socialize over cookies and punch. Besides the regular exhibits there will be antique toys around the children's room tree upstairs and a button collection.

This is the third year WCHS has met in a historic building in December. Last year it was Kempf house and the previous year, the Wilson-Wahr house.

COOKIES NEEDED, PLEASE

Cookies are needed for the WCHS Christmas meeting December 18. Will you contribute some of your favorites? If so, please telephone Jewel Reynolds, refreshment chairman, at 662-0139 as soon as possible.

COOKY BOOK NOTICE

Alloa Anderson asks that anyone who bought her Christmas cooky book in October contact her at 663-2128 for some information omitted from one recipe. It is included in later copies which are on sale at \$3.50 from Mrs. Anderson.

HOW TO BECOME PRESIDENT

By Preston W. Slosson
U-M Professor-Emeritus of History

In the old days when kings really ruled there used to be a daydream "If I were king . . ." Today the few remaining kings and queens are merely figureheads. Theodore Roosevelt called a constitutional monarch "A sort of perpetual vice-president plus leader of the social '400'."

The world today is governed either by dictators or constitutional prime ministers and presidents. If you want to become a dictator read Machiavelli. If you want to become president of the United States listen to me.

So far as constitutional requirements go, you have to be a native born American citizen, at least 35 years of age, and not have been already chosen twice. But there is another qualification harder to meet. You have to get elected. In practical politics that means that you must first be nominated by one of the two leading parties. For this you have to have or seem to have, certain qualifications that the American people usually expect.

Following President Wilson's example, I shall list "14 points": (1) sex, (2) race, (3) national ancestry, (4) religion, (5) age, (6) place of residence, (7) previous occupation, (8) experience in public office, (9) social and economic status, (10) family relationships, (11) character, (12) ability, (13) temperament, (14) political attitude and opinions.

First as to sex. Though foreign observers have called the American people the most feminist of all the nations, and though there is no legal restriction on a woman holding any elective office, we have not only yet to have a woman president but there is no likelihood of one very soon. In this respect we lag behind India, with Indira Gandhi, Israel, with Golda Meir, and perhaps England where Margaret Thatcher leads the Conservative party and thus is in



line for the next premiership, if her party wins. My guess is that one of the major parties will nominate a woman for vice-president sometime in the near future, and the ice will be broken.

Race is still a barrier. Negroes have made it to the cabinet, Supreme Court, both houses of Congress, and the mayoralty of many large cities. But the major parties still seem leery of nominating any for president or vice-president. The story goes that in 1904 when the Democrats nominated for vice-president the octogenarian Davis, it cost them one southern vote: "I have always been a Democrat," he said, "but I will never vote for a man who is even one-eighth Negro."

Irving Wallace's excellent political novel *The Man*, tells how chance might bring it about. The president, vice-president and speaker of the house die in rapid succession, and next in line is the president pro-tem of the Senate, who happens to be Negro.

About other races, one is less sure. Curtis, Hoover's vice-president, was one-quarter Indian. No Asiatic seems probable in the near future, but someday that question may well arise.

Except where race is involved, national origin is no longer much of a criterion. Though a majority of our presidents have ancestors from Great Britain, when in 1968 the Republicans nominated a Greek for vice-president and the Democrats a Pole, nobody seemed alarmed. I believe a president of Jewish ancestry is possible; it is true that Goldwater was defeated, but his Jewish background does not seem to have been a factor.

As to religion, all our presidents, except the Deist Jefferson and the Catholic, Kennedy, were counted as Protestants, although not all were actually church members.

Many denominations were represented. The important fact is that all our presidents were polite to the churches and broadly tolerant in their attitude to other faiths. We have had no anti-clerical presidents, and such politicians as Tom Paine and Bob Ingersoll found their anti-religious prejudices a distinct political handicap. As the shrewd French political scientist De Tocqueville said about 150 years ago, "When a candidate attacks one denomination, people of that very sect may vote for him; if he attacks them all everyone abandons him." This is in marked contrast with Latin Europe and Latin America, where anti-clericals have sometimes risen to power.

The constitution sets a lower limit of 35 for the president, but no upper limit. Yet the youngest man ever to become president was Theodore Roosevelt, at 42. The youngest *elected* president was Kennedy at 43, and the oldest elected was "Tippecanoe" Harrison at 68, and he died within a few weeks of taking office. Eisenhower at 70 was the oldest still in office. This is in marked contrast with England. The younger Pitt was Prime Minister at 24 (though people jested good-naturedly at "a kingdom trusted to a school-boy's care") and Gladstone (nicknamed the GOM for Grand Old Man) reluctantly resigned his fourth ministry at 84, only because sight and hearing were failing him. Thus the British age range for supreme power is more than twice our own. On the continent, too, elected statesmen have wielded power in their 20's and their 80's.

Bryan was only 36 when first nominated in 1896, and his youth was a target for critics. I recall a Republican cartoon showing McKinley in 1861 as a uniformed volunteer in the Union Army and Bryan as a baby in a crib. The legend beneath ran: "In 1861 McKinley was defending the nation's honor, and he is doing it

yet; in 1861 Bryan was shaking a rattle, and he is doing it yet!"

Residence is very important. It is not by accident that most presidential nominees come from large, doubtful states like Ohio and New York. Our electoral college system, with the entire weight of the state cast for one candidate, even if he wins by the closest margin, may make the winning of one large state crucial. I think the strongest case for abolition of the electoral college is not that it falsifies the results, but that it limits the range of nominations.

In 1928 there were two Democrats, equally able and popular, and prominent, but suffering from what was then the handicap of being Roman Catholics—Governor Alfred Smith of New York and Senator Walsh of Montana. But Montana had only four electoral votes; New York, 36. It is easy to guess which was nominated.

The state of birth matters much less than the state of residence. Few people have thought of Lincoln, Wilson and Eisenhower as southerners, yet Lincoln was born in Kentucky, Wilson in Virginia and Eisenhower in Texas.

Most American presidents were trained as lawyers, and many as soldiers. Not only professional soldiers—Washington, Jackson, the elder Harrison, Taylor, Grant, and Eisenhower—but civilians who served with credit in various wars—Hayes, Garfield, the younger Harrison, McKinley, Roosevelt of San Juan Hill—were helped by military fame. Several other military heroes were nominated though not elected—Scott, Fremont, McClellan and Hancock.

But other occupations are slightly represented or not at all. No inventor, no scientist, no artist, no physician, no minister of the gospel, appears. Strangely enough for a capitalist country, no multi-millionaire or great industrialist or wealthy merchant; Hoover, mining engineer and promoter, comes nearest to what one would expect. Though some few taught school in early youth, Wilson is the only

professional educator. Though several wrote books, there is no professional author, in the sense in which the word may be used of Prime Minister Disraeli of England. Though journalism is closely related to politics, it has furnished only three nominees—Greeley, Cox and Harding—and only Harding was elected.

Except for a few nominated entirely on their military record, presidents have had some previous experience in public office, though often very little. In the days of "King Caucus," cabinet members and former vice-presidents were most favored; since the convention system came in, governors have been most frequent choices, though many have been Senators and a few, like McKinley, came from the House of Representatives.

Social class counts less here than in any other country. When *Life* some years ago printed pictures of presidential birthplaces, four or five were log cabins, and nearly all the rest modest frame houses. "Tippecanoe" Harrison found his



comfortable mansion represented in the campaign as a "log cabin," not only by his opponents but also by his supporters.

In startling contrast with what might have been expected, there is no correlation between a president's economic or social class and his political opinions. Some who came up from relative poverty, like Coolidge, Hoover and Nixon were conservative; others born to affluence, like the two Roosevelts and Kennedy, were liberal.

Family relations are important. We had only one bachelor president, Buchanan, though Cleveland was married after he entered the White House. Most have had children, though Washington was father only of his country. Obviously it is an advantage to any politician, running for any office, to have an attractive wife and photogenic children.

On the whole, the American voter is a better judge of character than of ability or policy. All our presidents have been patriotic in intention. None have been as stupid as some hereditary monarchs, and none as harsh and tyrannical as are nearly all dictators.

I know as a historian that all presidents and candidates have been accused in their time of breaking all the commandments, but in politics the most frequently broken commandment is the ninth, against bearing false witness. Nine-tenths of the rumors and "roorbacks" circulated by word of mouth against any candidate have little or no factual basis. At worst, some presidents have been moral weaklings who appointed crooks and grafters to office, though so far as I know none shared in the loot themselves. If I could have but one wish for a president it would be that he would have the discernment to appoint able and honest subordinates, for no man in so vast a country can do everything himself.

As to ability, that is, of course, a matter of opinion. My own is that the American presidents rank about even with the British Prime Ministers during the same period; half a dozen political geniuses, many of good capacity, and a few mediocrities.

Temperament is important. Psychologists divide the human race into extroverts (genial, sociable people) and introverts (self-conscious and shy). By all means, in politics, be an extrovert. Most American presidents have been. There are a few exceptions—the two Adamses, Benjamin Harrison, Nixon, Coolidge, and perhaps Wilson. But the first three could never get a second term. Nixon and Wilson did, but not so much on personal grounds. That is, they did not have such a purely personal following, as did the very extrovert politicians Jackson, Clay, Blaine, Bryan and the two Roosevelts.

Moreover, Wilson is a special

case. Like most scholarly academics, he tended to be an introvert, but as a university president he was compelled to cultivate the ability to meet and address all manner of gatherings. Moreover, a university president, who has to manage unruly students, rambunctious professors, distrustful regents or trustees, and in state institutions, suspicious legislatures, would have little trouble in managing the cabinet and Congress! In fact, I think it an ideal training.

Finally, we come to political position. Now, conventions distrust equally the radical and the reactionary. Before the Civil War, no extreme advocate of slavery, like Calhoun, was nominated, nor any abolitionist, like Sumner. Four successive Republican conventions longed to nominate "Mr. Republican," but they knew that Senator Taft was too conservative to be elected and made other choices. At the other extreme, the Republican radical Senator LaFollette had his admirers, even his idolators, but he had to create his own little Progressive Party in 1924 to get nominated.

The only cases I can think of where this rule was broken, were the nominations on the left of Bryan and McGovern, and on the right of Goldwater. All three were badly defeated.

Now, there is an excellent reason why party conventions prefer a

relatively unknown man from the moderate center, to the most popular and prominent politicians who hold extreme opinions. With two strong parties you cannot hope to elect a president by hard core partisan votes alone. You must make inroads on neutrals and non-partisans, even the disaffected members of the opposite party. Before condemning unduly this caution reflect that Lincoln was a compromise candidate, less known than Seward or Chase, and yet a panel of historians selected him as the greatest American president. As a British writer put it, "The politicians in 1860 did their usual deal, and *happened* upon the noble, tremendous *accident* of Abraham Lincoln."

So to conclude. If you want to be elected president, be a white, male, Protestant from a large, doubtful state, from forty to 60 years old, with a training in the law and some experience as a soldier, a holder of some public office; have an attractive family, let no great scandal attach to your name; be moderate in opinion and genial in temperament. Even so, I guarantee nothing. Your opponent may also have these same qualities, or your party may be temporarily in eclipse. But you will have at least a thousand times the chance of anyone who lacks three or four of these qualifications.

These rules are not absolute. Until Franklin Roosevelt was elected for a third term in 1940

there was an unwritten taboo against it (which has recently been written into the Constitution), and until Kennedy won in 1960 it seemed impossible for a Roman Catholic to be chosen. Other present stipulations are bound to perish in the future. They are merely guidelines of probability.

I need hardly say that they are not ideal. This is the United States of America, not the United States of Utopia. A nation of philosophers would lay greater stress on ability, knowledge and experience. But compare our list with any list of rulers of any other country, and I think you will agree with Bryce, the British politician and political scientist, that if the American system does not always get the absolute best, it screens out the worst, and perhaps even with the cynic who said "Providence looks after children, drunkards, and the United States of America!"



PALEONTOLOGIST TO TALK

Professor Gerald R. Smith, director of the U-M museum of paleontology and associate curator of the museum of zoology, will speak at the January 26 WCHS meeting. His topic is "Ice Age Animals and Environments in Michigan."

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WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING.

SUNDAY
 4:00-6:00 P.M.
 DECEMBER 18, 1977

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