

## **POLITICS ON THE PLAINS: THOMAS CARNEY AND THE PURSUIT OF OFFICE DURING THE GILDED AGE**

by Kyle S. Sinisi

In James C. Malin's 1964 work on politics and party platforms, *A Concern About Humanity*, Malin documented the underlying importance of reform in late nineteenth-century Kansas politics. As part of his analysis, Malin asserted that Kansas reform movements, such as prohibition and Populism, traced their origins to the early 1870s. According to Malin, the state during that time experienced a negative reaction to the political "men and corruption" of the preceding ten years. In a brief discussion of this negative reaction, Malin identified the fraud-filled reelection bids of Congressman Sidney Clarke in 1870 and Senator Samuel E. Pomeroy in 1873 as being pivotal in creating the reform movement.<sup>1</sup>

While both of these incidents did indeed help spark the effort to clean up Kansas politics by selecting more discrete leaders, they were, in reality, secondary occurrences in a broader course of events. Not only was Kansas being swept by a growing national and regional drive to eliminate political corruption, but Clarke's and Pomeroy's activities seemed to pale when considered alongside those of one-time Governor Thomas Carney. If anything, the reform impulse in Kansas owed a great deal more to the then well-publicized political irregularities of Carney than has previously been acknowledged.

Thomas Carney was a man consumed by ambition, and he spared few expenses in a quest to re-acquire the political power he wielded as a wartime governor. In fact, during the immediate post-Civil War era few men—including both Pomeroy and Clarke—figured as prominently, and in as many Kansas elections, as Carney. But the governor's ambition far exceeded his good judgment. By 1873, Carney had become identified with two widely publicized election scandals. These incidents ruined his political career and, more importantly, galvanized many state political leaders toward the purging of corruption from the election process. Carney's troubles were, therefore, synonymous with the type of election politics that caused a movement to eliminate the men and corruption of Kansas's early Gilded Age.

## EARLY DRIVES FOR OFFICE

Carney's political career was meteoric. A political unknown when originally elected governor in 1862, Carney owed his first major triumph to the strength and influence of Republican Senator James H. Lane. The Senator controlled the political and governmental apparatus of Kansas and apparently believed that Carney would be content to be a mere figurehead. Carney did not, however, work long with Lane. The governor ran afoul of his benefactor when he openly coveted Lane's seat in Congress and the Senator's position as the undisputed king of Kansas government. A bitter political battle ensued that culminated with Lane defeating Carney in the senatorial election of 1865. Carney's political career was apparently finished, and Lane appeared firmly in control of a Republican party that dominated state government in the absence of any real Democratic opposition.

Although most biographical sketches of Carney end with this electoral debacle, his political career was far from over. He yearned for office and commenced a political comeback by being elected mayor of Leavenworth, Kansas, for two successive terms beginning in 1865. Not satisfied with a purely local office, he aimed for a return to political preeminence as either governor or United States Senator.<sup>2</sup>

As a candidate for state-wide office, Carney carried with him a distinct list of assets and liabilities. In his favor, Carney was a successful businessman who, during his gubernatorial administration, had saved the financial credit of Kansas through strong fiscal measures. Moreover, he maintained strong ties with several railroad companies which had expressed interest in building lines through Kansas. A member of the board of directors of the Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Galveston Railroad, Carney seemed to be just the man who could bring economic prosperity to Kansas.

Although possessing a fiscal and business reputation unsurpassed by any other Kansas politician, the former governor still had problems. Questions abounded concerning his political ideology—or reliability. During the war, Carney had been a moderate Republican in an overwhelmingly Republican state. At that time his moderate stance meant a desire to avoid conflict with Missouri and a gradualist approach to the problems of reconstruction and black suffrage. Kansans generally supported this moderate approach. But in the years immediately following the war, most Kansans joined many other northerners in opposing the moderate reconstruction ideas of President Andrew Johnson.

While avoiding any pronouncements on state or national issues in 1865 and 1866, Carney saw Kansas Republicans leave the moderate faction in droves. In the most obvious example, Carney witnessed the political destruction of his one-time bitter rival, Senator Lane. A fiery Radical during the war, Lane in January 1866 had abandoned the Radical cause to favor President Johnson in the hopes of receiving political patronage. The switch proved disastrous. Popular and

political rejection of Lane was so strong that the mentally unstable Lane committed suicide in July 1866. New charges of corruption may also have pushed Lane to this end.

Because of these developments, Carney steered away from political entanglements during the rest of 1866. Carney even avoided endorsing his best friend and political lieutenant, James McDowell, who was running for governor as a pro-Johnson Republican, or National Union Party candidate. By the fall of 1866, Carney realized that supporting the president was a liability for anyone seeking office in Kansas, which the gubernatorial election of that year graphically illustrated. The incumbent Republican, Samuel J. Crawford, polled 19,370 votes to McDowell's 8,152.

After McDowell's defeat, Carney appeared to realize that a political opportunity had arrived. Although Crawford was the overwhelming choice of Republicans, he did not dominate the levers of power in the state party. The death of James Lane left a power vacuum in state politics that Carney thought he could fill. With his second term as mayor winding down, the former governor decided to reenter the state-wide political arena. Despite the recently poor track record of moderate candidates, Carney believed that he could separate himself from President Johnson. He somehow regained McDowell's support, organized his political canvass, and planned for the state legislature to elect him a senator when it convened in January 1867. Carney thought his chances particularly good because he would have two opportunities at becoming a senator. Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy's term ended in March, and Lane's seat, temporarily occupied by Edmund G. Ross, would have to be permanently filled. Carney relished the situation of a dual election. He responded to the opportunity by planning to run first against Pomeroy for what was known as the "long term" of six years. If Pomeroy proved too strong, Carney believed he had the political flexibility to switch his candidacy to Lane's now vacant seat, or the "short term" of four years.<sup>3</sup>

Prospects looked good for Carney. During the first week in January an informal poll of state legislators showed that Carney had 40 votes, Pomeroy 21, and General Albert Lee 19, with 31 uncommitted. Furthermore, while ten of the state's newspapers remained neutral, at least nine of the 32 politically active newspapers endorsed him. The *Topeka Leader*, in particular, praised Carney as "a great worker [and] an independent thinker." Even the normally anti-Carney Leavenworth *Conservative* toned down its editorials and allowed the printing of articles favorable to Carney. Moreover, merchants in both Leavenworth and Topeka sent petitions to the legislature heralding Carney's virtues as a financial administrator. The people of Leavenworth gave Carney widespread support. One citizen demonstrated an extreme example of this support by swearing he would never cut his hair again unless Carney was elected.<sup>4</sup>

The excitement in Leavenworth quickly spread to Topeka where a carnival atmosphere—literally and figuratively—soon affected the proceedings. The *Conservative* reported that "the excitement on the Senatorial issue is so great that

the wild men of Borneo and the Siamese Twins, who are here, fail to draw attention." Gamblers flocked to the state capital and "one prominent sporting man from Leavenworth" started a "Senatorial pool [where] candidates are sold to the highest bidder, according the established rules of 'racing pool.'" Caucusing took place around the clock as politicians travelled from room to room within each of the candidate's campaign headquarters. By January 7, the Topeka Hotel was particularly busy as senatorial hopefuls Carney, Charles Robinson, and Albert Lee rented out numerous sleeping, eating, and caucusing rooms. While enthusiasm for Carney burned in the first few days of the canvass, support among the state legislators waned. According to one newspaper report: "One moment, Carney is far ahead; another, you are astounded by the fact, confidentially communicated by one of his friends, that Pomeroy is gaining strength."<sup>5</sup>

One factor helped account for this decline. In the middle of the canvass, Carney embraced the Radical cause publicly. Having seen both Lane and McDowell politically defeated for supporting a moderate philosophy, Carney tried to convince the public and the legislature that he was an old-time Radical. In an unusual move, Carney made his inaugural address of 1864 an issue of the canvass. By Carney's own admission, that document was moderate in tone. In particular, Carney had endorsed Lincoln's plan of a gradual enfranchisement of the freedmen. Now, in early January 1867, Carney claimed to have been forced into this position by some of his moderate advisors. But the philosophical flip-flop produced no beneficial results. In fact, it undermined Carney's efforts to rally many of his old Civil War supporters and advisors.<sup>6</sup>

Some of these men, such as Sol Miller, editor of the *Kansas Chief*, attacked Carney for his efforts to duck responsibility for the inaugural address of 1864. Miller's anger knew few limits as he informed his readers that:

Whenever he [Carney] aspires to public position, he surrounds himself in his head-quarters with jugs and bottles, where his adherents may drink and carouse until they are in a sufficiently abject condition for his use. Even now, at Topeka, his head-quarters are said to be one vast doggery and gambling den. His liquors flow freely, and he is the presiding genius of the orgies.<sup>7</sup>

The *Wyandotte Gazette* joined Miller in charging Carney with "literally flooding Topeka in whisky." Carney and his supporters could do little to fight this sudden backlash except spread pamphlets in the legislature denouncing Senator Pomeroy. The tide had turned against Carney.<sup>8</sup>

Just before the first ballot was cast on January 22, 1867, Carney decided to drop out of the race against Pomeroy. He then switched his efforts to winning the short term seat by defeating Edmund Ross. Once again, Carney's chances looked good initially. In an informal poll of legislators, the former governor led Ross by 12 votes. Moreover, when preliminary balloting occurred in the separate

houses of the legislature, Carney held a slim lead over Ross and two other candidates in the Senate. But because Carney did not gain a majority of the votes in the House of Representatives, the election had to be thrown into a joint session of both houses on the 23rd. All that Carney had to do in order to be elected was preserve his simple majority of voters through an inevitable night of what one eyewitness called "quiet hobnobbing," "significant winks, and still more significant whispers. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

However, when the legislators convened in joint session late the next morning, they voted quickly and selected Pomeroy for the long term and Ross for the short term. By 28 votes, Thomas Carney had failed to become a senator for the second time in one day. The sudden change in Carney's political fortunes can be explained in two ways. First, Carney miscalculated the effects of his strategy to portray himself a Radical. Most legislators simply did not believe him. They thought Carney a "Johnsonite" moderate incapable of voting like a true Radical Republican. Furthermore, Carney's story concerning the altered inaugural address of 1864 made him look foolish. Even if the story was true, it proved to some legislators that Carney could be easily manipulated by others. Perhaps more important, the story also demonstrated that Carney readily turned on his friends and advisors. Sol Miller thought that Carney "preached his own funeral sermon" by pursuing such a ruinous strategy.<sup>10</sup>

Other, more sympathetic political observers thought that Carney lost for another reason. They admitted his strategy failed, but they also suspected that Carney was the victim of a massive bribery scheme. According to the *Burlington Kansas Weekly Patriot*, Carney had, therefore, been "more sinned against, than he [had] sinned." Unlike many of the allegations that surfaced in the aftermath of elections in Kansas, there was an element of truth in the *Patriot's* claim. Congressional and legislative investigations later revealed that substantial amounts of money had been expended in this election.<sup>11</sup>

While Samuel Pomeroy spent approximately \$30,000 to cover the "expenses" of his many supporters, no solid evidence directly implicated either him or Ross in illegal actions. Most testimony left no doubt, however, that some legislators had been bought by third parties who opposed Carney. One eyewitness to the canvass, William Spriggs, stated that Leavenworth and New York merchant Perry Fuller paid \$42,000 in bribes to defeat Carney. Fuller competed with Carney's wholesale grocery business for government supply contracts, and he believed that Carney, if elected, would use his influence to monopolize the Indian trade in Kansas. Fuller estimated the trade at \$500,000 per year and, therefore, worth the bribes necessary to keep Carney out of office.<sup>12</sup>

Carney had been sinned against but, significantly, he had also sinned. Reputed to be the wealthiest merchant in Kansas, Carney also tried to buy the election. In 1872, legislator Richard Mobley stated he was offered \$2,500 by a Carney aide, John Fletcher, to cast his vote for the former governor. In another case, Carney gave a supporter, Leonard T. Smith, \$25,000 to procure at least ten

votes. Some confusion exists as to whether Smith actually succeeded in meeting his quota of votes, but without question Carney paid him to carry out that mission. As in most of the elections in Kansas since 1854, bribery had been a two-edged sword; Carney's opponents had just out-spent him.<sup>13</sup>

Immediately after his failed senatorial bid, Carney became the subject of widespread political speculation. He even attended a massive retirement banquet held in his honor in Leavenworth on January 31. Although Carney had made no retirement announcement, prominent pro-Carney Republicans from throughout the state, including Ward Burlingame, George Veal, Samuel Atwood, and Josiah Kellogg, arranged the farewell. The *Leavenworth Conservative* recorded that many of these men spoke at great length, and that the evening climaxed with Carney's own oration "upon the political issues of the day."<sup>14</sup>

Carney's dogged pursuit of political power and office suggested that talk of his political retirement was premature; and, indeed, it was. Less than nine months later, on October 17, 1867, he delivered a speech at a political rally in Lawrence. In yet another attempt to rid himself of the moderate label, Carney spoke at length in support of immediate black suffrage. In what became his fashion in most of his post-Civil War speeches, Carney quoted from his inaugural address of 1864. He also offered a substantial history lesson on the abolitionist movement and its contributions to society. No record exists as to how well Carney's speech was received, but six months later, in March 1868, he appeared again on the political scene. This time he circulated among the delegates at a Republican convention in Topeka with the clear intention of reestablishing his position within the state Republican party.<sup>15</sup>

The state convention met to choose delegates for the national presidential convention in Chicago, and Carney played an active role in the proceedings. By the convention's conclusion, he had attempted three things. First, Carney campaigned for his selection as a delegate to Chicago. Second, he reopened his efforts to persuade prominent Republicans that he was a faithful, and Radical, member of the party. And finally, he floated his name as a potential gubernatorial candidate in the November 1868 state general election. Although he did not succeed in becoming a delegate to the party national convention, Carney did leave the Topeka meeting with enough support to mount another run at the governor's chair. He then concentrated his efforts on winning the Republican nomination at the next party convention on September 9 and 10.<sup>16</sup>

It was not until mid-August, however, that Carney's candidacy began to attract attention throughout the state. As in all of his political contests, Carney drew heavy support from Leavenworth County—the state's most populous area. But he was not without his problems even in Leavenworth. While that county's oldest and most prominent newspapers, the *Leavenworth Times* and the *Leavenworth Conservative*, endorsed Carney emphatically, another paper grew to power within the county and challenged his political strength. Controlled by Daniel Anthony, who also desired the gubernatorial nomination, the

Leavenworth *Weekly Bulletin* proved a formidable enemy for Carney. In the month prior to the convention, Anthony and editor F. S. Pinckney smeared Carney as an intellectual midget incapable of writing his own speeches or letters. Pro-Carney supporters could not ignore such charges. One newspaper editor retaliated on behalf of Carney by claiming that Anthony had been fired as postmaster in 1866 because he had seduced a young girl, failed to support her, and watched her commit suicide.<sup>17</sup>

Besides Anthony, Carney faced an array of rival candidates including George Crawford—who was no relation to Governor Samuel Crawford—James Harvey, Thaddeus Walker, and W. W. Phillips. Carney persevered, however, and once again entered a political contest as the favorite. On August 20, the *Topeka Leader* reported that Carney would "receive the nomination by acclamation. . . ." The *Topeka State Record* agreed and guaranteed Carney's gubernatorial nomination. Wilder's *Conservative* believed that Kansans favored Carney "with a unanimity which cannot be resisted." The printed support for Carney even transcended a major Indian uprising that developed in western Kansas. Despite almost daily reports of new atrocities, Carney continued to dominate the pages of many newspapers.<sup>18</sup>

As in January 1867, however, Carney failed to sustain the pre-convention support. His first reversal occurred on the convention's first day, September 9, when Daniel Anthony captured the position of convention president. Anthony withdrew from the gubernatorial race, but his selection indicated that the delegates were not entirely pro-Carney. The situation did not improve during a night of caucusing when Carney lost some of his supporters to other candidates. The next day brought more disappointment. Four rounds of balloting saw Carney finish with no more than 24 votes as compared to 40 for George Crawford and 25 for James Harvey. After the fourth ballot, Carney had his former Lieutenant Governor, Thomas Osborn, withdraw his name from the contest. Most of Carney's votes then went to Harvey, and the convention declared Harvey the Republican nominee on the fifth ballot.<sup>19</sup>

## THE ELECTION OF 1871 AND THE END OF A CAREER

After this defeat, his second consecutive political set-back, Carney made no reported announcements or appearances. He did not even mount the political stump and support Harvey as he had publicly promised to do after the convention. And, interestingly, there was little reported speculation on his political future. With another two years before any major office was available, he had plenty of time to plan as well as to reflect on his inability to transfer early political support into an electoral triumph. The enforced political hiatus also allowed him to devote more attention to his businesses, which included dissolving one wholesale grocery store while creating two new stores in Leavenworth and

St. Louis. The latter store eventually occupied a majority of his time, and by 1871 he was only a part-time resident of Leavenworth.<sup>20</sup>

Carney's business activities between 1868 and 1871 did not, however, preclude him from monitoring the political situation in Kansas. Especially interesting to him was Edmund Ross's senatorial term that expired in March 1871. The legislature would select his replacement at the session beginning in January 1871, and Carney already knew that Ross would not run again. In 1868, Ross had cast one of the deciding votes for acquittal in President Andrew Johnson's impeachment trial. Even if the many threats of Radical Kansans against his life were never carried out, Ross had ruined any chance of ever again holding office in Kansas.

Carney understood Ross's political blunder, and throughout the summer of 1870 he debated running for Ross's senatorial seat. In October Carney met in Leavenworth with his former advisor, Leonard Smith. Since 1867 Smith had developed into a potential king-maker in Kansas politics. He had achieved success as a railroad agent and as a member of the board of directors for several railroads, including the Missouri River Railroad and the Atchison and Northwestern Kansas. Smith, therefore, wielded great power within the legislature, which made him a preferred ally and a dreaded enemy. Carney sought Smith's support on the basis of this influence and a mutual desire between the two men to see Leavenworth become a midwestern rail center.<sup>21</sup>

In their first meeting, Smith agreed with Carney that Leavenworth must have United States Senator to represent its railroad interests. But Smith refused to commit either himself or the powerful railroad interests he represented to a particular candidate in the upcoming election. By the second meeting, in December, he had changed his mind. Smith informed Carney that he would back another railroad man for the position, Alexander Caldwell of Leavenworth. Smith backed Caldwell for two reasons. First, Smith believed Carney incapable of uniting the state legislature behind his candidacy. Carney's repeated bids for office had created too many animosities within the state. Second, and most important, Carney had earlier put himself at odds with one of Smith's railroads which was trying to build a line into Leavenworth. The Kansas Pacific Railway had failed to meet its contractual obligation to finish its line by a specified time, and Carney had already come out in favor of Leavenworth's withdrawing its financial aid for that particular railroad. Alexander Caldwell, on the other hand, favored giving the railway a waiver to allow continued construction.<sup>22</sup>

Despite Caldwell's known ties to the Kansas Pacific Railway, the news that Smith supported Caldwell shocked Carney. Caldwell had no political experience. Carney reacted emotionally. He told Smith that he would run for the senate despite Smith's lack of support. And if his own support proved too weak, Carney insisted he would give his votes to rival candidate Sidney Clarke, of Douglas County, instead. Following their meeting, however, Carney hesitated in announcing his availability for the Senate. He sounded out other prominent

politicians in the state for their opinions concerning his chances, and they were none too optimistic. Carney, therefore, remained an unannounced candidate. Little changed until near the end of the month when Carney, Smith, and Caldwell met again in Leavenworth.<sup>23</sup>

By this time, Caldwell and Smith had begun to believe Carney's threats. They were worried that Carney might seriously undermine their own efforts. Smith later told Caldwell that if Carney was candidate, "we would lose the Senator (sic)." To prevent disruption, they now offered Carney inducements to stay out of the race. Carney did not hesitate. Stating that he had spent large quantities of money in his previous elections, Carney demanded \$15,000 before the election for any support he might lend Caldwell. Although Smith agreed to the deal, Caldwell refused to pay Carney until after his election had been secured. Carney did not change his conditions for payment, and Caldwell promptly withdrew the offer.<sup>24</sup>

During the first and second weeks of January 1871, Caldwell was forced to reconsider his position. The legislature had just convened, and the politicians of Leavenworth had yet to warm to his candidacy. Despite his and Smith's prolonged efforts to publicize the campaign, the *Leavenworth Times* continued to ask the question, "Who is Caldwell?" When the *Times* finally did acknowledge Caldwell it was only to say his candidacy was "absolutely flat." Correspondingly, pressure in both Leavenworth and Topeka mounted for Carney to announce his intentions. After receiving numerous telegrams from his supporters in Topeka, Carney went to the state capital on January 10. His appearance in Topeka reassured many of his supporters who had arrived a few days before. One eyewitness reported: "Carney's presence here is developing a strength alike gratifying and surprising to his friends."<sup>25</sup>

Late at night on the 10th, Smith re-approached Carney. Despite Carney's popularity in the press, Smith tried to convince Carney that it would be useless to run for election. After all, Carney had had this kind of support before and lost. Furthermore, Caldwell was prepared to spend \$250,000 in order to defeat him. Smith also placed the offer of \$15,000 back on the table for Carney. The former governor made no immediate decision, and he left the meeting. After speaking with trusted members of the Leavenworth delegation, Carney decided the next day to accept Smith's offer and drop from the race. Caldwell, through Smith, agreed to pay Carney \$10,000 before the election and \$5,000 after he had been elected. Adding poor judgment to their already questionable ethics, both parties inexplicably created the following document:

I hereby agree that I will not under any condition or circumstance be a candidate for the U.S.S. [United States Senate] in the year 1871 without the written consent of A. Caldwell and in case I do, to forfeit my word of honor hereby pledged, I further agree and bind myself to

forfeit the sum of fifteen thousand dollars and authorise the publication of this agreement.

Topeka January 13th 1871

Thos Carney<sup>26</sup>

Even with the ordinarily forgiving electorate of Kansas, such a document could not have been published without destroying the careers of all those concerned. It is not known what these men were thinking when they created this agreement. Incredibly, the situation got worse. Thomas Carney began to have second thoughts concerning his pledge to Caldwell. After most state newspapers printed Carney's withdrawal announcement, a number of politicians encouraged Carney to repudiate his statement. Other men publicly "deplored" his withdrawal. There was even speculation that Carney had staged the withdrawal to provoke a public outcry against the inexperienced Caldwell. Why else, asked the *Leavenworth Commercial*, did Carney's own political organ, the *Leavenworth Times*, continue to pillory Caldwell?<sup>27</sup>

Leonard Smith was immediately aware of this activity. He had always distrusted Carney, but now he resorted to having him followed by detectives. Smith knew he would be in a difficult position if Carney chose to back out of the pledge. He had finally realized that to print their agreement would spell political suicide for Caldwell. Smith, therefore, chose to meet again with Carney and offer him new inducements to stay out of the race. At their meeting on either January 22 or 23, Carney sensed Smith's eagerness to make another deal. Consequently, Carney asked for \$7,000 to cover his "expenses" and mollify his political ambitions.<sup>28</sup>

Smith did not inform Caldwell of his new demand. Instead, he decided to pay Carney out of his own pocket. The deal did not work. Almost immediately after their meeting, Carney had second thoughts yet again. He still had not made up his mind when the legislature convened on the 24th to vote for the first time. As in most of the legislature's first ballot votes, no one candidate received majorities in each of the separate houses. The election had to be thrown into a joint session of the legislature the following day.

Caldwell and Sidney Clarke were the only two serious candidates heading into the late-night caucuses. During the early part of the evening, the first of many bizarre twists occurred. Carney remained indecisive, while Sidney Clarke believed his own chances for election weak. Caldwell had already offered to pay for Clarke's expenses, too, but Clarke looked to someone other than Caldwell for a deal. He turned to his former political enemy, Carney. In return for an undisclosed amount, Clarke offered Carney all of his votes. Carney was tempted. He immediately sought advice from a number of people. First, he saw James McDowell. McDowell advised him not to accept Clarke's offer because Clarke lacked enough support to be elected. McDowell gave sound advice, but he had an additional reason for urging Carney to stay out. Evidently unknown to

Carney, McDowell had already cast his lot with Caldwell. Since 1867 the election of Senator Edmund Ross, McDowell had lost his job as postmaster of Leavenworth. Caldwell promised it back if McDowell helped run his canvass.<sup>29</sup>

Carney did not accept McDowell's advice as the final word on the question. Carney next saw W. F. Drenning, a Leavenworth politician, who also urged Carney not to take Clarke's offer. Carney disagreed. At about nine o'clock in the evening Carney interrupted a caucus of some Leavenworth politicians and demanded a meeting of the entire delegation to discuss Clarke's offer, although the whole delegation was probably not privy to the price of Clarke's delegates. Led by McDowell, this group finally persuaded Carney that he had no chance because some of Clarke's delegates had already gone over to Caldwell. Carney's hopes were completely dashed. A short time later he informed Clarke of his final decision not to run. Clarke's chances for election flickered for a few more hours, but he eventually sought out Caldwell for a deal. By three o'clock in the morning it was all over. Caldwell's agent, Robert S. Stevens, gave Clarke \$1,500. The very next day the legislature elected Alexander Caldwell Senator.<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Slightly more than two years after the election, most of these back-room dealings became public knowledge. Three separate congressional and legislative investigations left little to the public's imagination as the senatorial vote-buying fraud dwarfed all other news in Kansas, including that of the growing national Credit Mobilier scandal. While charges of corruption and electoral bribery had become a standard part of elections in Kansas up to that point in time, the election of 1871 provided Kansans with the first election which implicated all the major candidates.

A clumsily-run affair, the election produced no real individual winners. None of the major candidates escaped without suffering damage to his political career. For Alexander Caldwell, the damage was immediate. At the conclusion of the investigations in 1873, he resigned his seat in the Senate. For Sidney Clarke, although later elected to the state legislature, his further pursuit of high office in Kansas seemed impossible. After the scandal subsided, he moved to Oklahoma where he continued his search for political power. For Thomas Carney, the senatorial election was a disaster only made worse by his decision in 1872 to flee Kansas in order to avoid testifying before a legislative investigating committee. When Carney was finally brought before the United States Senate in 1873, the former governor admitted to accepting Caldwell's bribes, while also seeking ways to renege on the agreements. Carney's widely-publicized testimony sealed his political fate. He never again sought public office.

For Kansas, however, the election proved to be yet another event that propelled the state into an era of election reform. News of corruption in 1871

had followed quickly on the heels of an investigation into Thomas Carney's awkward senatorial election bid in 1867. But these two elections did not mark an immediate end to the state's political scandals. In 1873 a state legislator accused Senator Pomeroy of offering bribes during that year's senatorial selection campaign. Pomeroy was soon ousted from office, and Kansas's politics experienced a reform impulse that transcended the already documented political elimination of men such as Caldwell, Clarke, Carney, and Pomeroy. A group of liberal Republicans, the self-styled "Purifiers," grew in strength and worked earnestly to purge the party's ranks of dishonest members. Since the state elections of 1868, the Purifiers had been identified chiefly as an anti-Clarke faction committed to the election of almost anyone but Clarke. Yet the rapidly decaying nature of state politics helped blend the Purifiers into the broader reform effort. By 1874 the move to cleanse state politics affected most party leaders. Even those men who had previously been known as notorious "corruptionists" and enemies of any type of political reform now adopted the rhetoric of reform. The best example of this group of men was Governor Thomas Osborn who suddenly clamored for an end to a style of election where "individual ambition, always contagious, . . . becomes epidemic, and a corruption issues from it as certainly as miasma from a morass."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps more indicative of the growing reaction to this corruption was an independent reform party which split from main-line Republicans in 1874 with the announced intention of returning governments to the hands of virtuous public servants. Citizens and political leaders long accustomed to a rough pattern of politics and government had reached a point in the 1870s where some form of change was thought necessary. While the charge against corruption suffered some setbacks during this period, revealed most notably by rampant fraud within the state treasury, politics had become imbued with the idea of removing the excesses of the past. Thomas Carney did not invent the style of electioneering that produced this reaction, but revelations of his unrestrained ambition and poor judgment contributed significantly to a changing definition of accepted political behavior among those Kansans both desiring and holding public office.

#### ENDNOTES

1. James C. Malin, *A Concern About Humanity: Notes on Reform, 1872-1912 at the National and Kansas Levels of Thought* (Lawrence: James C. Malin, 1964), p. 19. For an introduction to the issue of corruption during the Gilded Age see Ari Hoogenboom, "Did Gilded Age Scandals Bring Reform?" in *Before Watergate: Problems of Corruption in American Society*, ed. Abraham S. Eisenstadt (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1978), pp. 125-142.

2. For the most recent biographical account of Caruey see Homer Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), pp. 86-88.

3. *Report of the Joint Committee of Investigation Appointed by the Kansas Legislature of 1872* (Topeka: S. S. Prouty, Public Printer, 1873), pp. 102-113 (hereafter cited as *Report of the Joint*

- Committee); U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the Committee on Privileges and Elections*, S. Rept. 224, 42nd Congress, 2nd Session, 1872, *passim*, pp. 1-42 (hereafter cited as *SRP 224*).
4. Leavenworth *Times*, January 10 and 19, 1867; Burlington *Kansas Weekly Patriot*, February 2, 1867; Topeka *Leader*, January 10 and 17, 1867; Leavenworth *Conservative*, January 19 and 23, 1867.
  5. Leavenworth *Conservative*, January 23, 1867; Leavenworth *Times*, January 8 and 12, 1867; White Cloud *Kansas Chief*, January 10 and 17, 1867; *Report of the Joint Committee*, p. 162.
  6. Leavenworth *Times*, January 4, 1867; White Cloud *Kansas Chief*, January 10, 1867.
  7. White Cloud *Kansas Chief*, January 17, 1867.
  8. Wyandotte *Gazette* quoted in Leavenworth *Times*, January 22, 1867; Topeka *Tribune*, January 18, 1867.
  9. *Senate Journal of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Kansas, 1867*, pp. 162-163 (hereafter cited as *Senate Journal*); Leavenworth *Conservative*, January 23, 1867; Leavenworth *Times*, January 23, 1867; Topeka *Leader*, January 24, 1867.
  10. Results for the "short term" were as follows: Edmund Ross, 68; Thomas Carney, 40; Samuel Riggs, 1. See: *Senate Journal, 1867*, pp. 171-173. Burlington *Kansas Weekly Patriot*, February 2, 1867; White Cloud *Kansas Chief*, February 7, 1867.
  11. Burlington *Kansas Weekly Patriot*, February 2, 1867.
  12. *SRP 224*, pp. 1-3; *Report of the Joint Committee*, pp. 195, 243.
  13. *Report of the Joint Committee*, pp. 208-209; U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the Committee on Privileges and Election*, S. Rept. 451, 42nd Congress, 3rd Session, 1873, p. 353 (hereafter cited as *SRP 451*).
  14. Leavenworth *Conservative*, February 1, 1867.
  15. "Manhood Suffrage Speech of Thomas Carney," Lawrence, October 17, 1867, *Kansas Collected Speeches and Pamphlets*, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
  16. Leavenworth *Weekly Bulletin*, August 19, 1868.
  17. *Ibid.*; Leavenworth *Conservative*, August 26 and 27, 1868. Daniel Anthony was the brother of the suffragette Susan B. Anthony.
  18. Topeka *State Record*, September 9, 1868; Leavenworth *Conservative*, September 1, 5, and 10, 1868; Topeka *Leader*, August 20, 1868; Topeka *State Record* quoted in Leavenworth *Conservative*, September 2, 1868.
  19. Leavenworth *Conservative*, September 11, 1868.
  20. Memorandum for the District Court of the First Judicial Court of the State of Kansas at Leavenworth, January 3, 1871, Thomas C. Stevens Collection, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; Leavenworth *City Directory, 1870-1871; SRP 451*, p. 240.
  21. *Report of the Joint Committee*, p. 87; *SRP 451*, pp. 97-98, 190.
  22. *Report of the Joint Committee*, pp. 87, 232; *SRP 451*, pp. 87-88.
  23. *Report of the Joint Committee*, p. 87; *SRP 451*, pp. 76, 97-98, 190.
  24. *SRP 451*, pp. 98-99, 191.
  25. Leavenworth *Times*, January 10, 12, and 13, 1871; *SRP 451*, pp. 98-99, 191-193.
  26. Leavenworth *Times*, January 13, 1871; *SRP 451*, pp. 98-99, 191-193, 246-247; Copy of memorandum in James L. McDowell Collection, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
  27. Leavenworth *Times*, January 15, 1871; Leavenworth *Commercial*, January 20, 1871.
  28. *SRP 451*, pp. 86-87, 90-92, 100-101.
  29. *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 125, 129, 374-375; *Report of the Joint Committee*, pp. 7-9, 102-113.
  30. *Report of the Joint Committee*, pp. 58-63; *SRP 451*, pp. 6, 89-92, 269, 427.

31. James C. Malin has cast some doubt on just how pure the "Purifiers" actually were. See his "Some Reconsiderations of the Defeat of Senator Pomeroy, 1873," *Mid-America* 48 (January 1966): 47-57. Also consult Mark A. Plummer's *Frontier Governor: Samuel J. Crawford* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1971), pp. 135-148. Osborn quoted in *Senate Journal, 1874*, p. 26.