

THE CRAWFORD FACTION AND THE VICE-PRESIDENTIAL QUESTION IN 1824: A CAMPAIGN DILEMMA

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The election of 1824 was a many-sided contest. Despite the absence of two major parties, partisanship was vigorous between the various leading personalities and factions of the Democratic-Republicans. This article examines the strategy of the William H. Crawford group as it related to their choice of a vice-presidential candidate.

The election of 1824 was one of the more confusing contests in America's political history. There were 16 or 17 candidates early in the race (1), but, this number was narrowed to 5 by the end of 1823. They were: Treasury Secretary William H. Crawford, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, House Speaker Henry Clay, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, and General Andrew Jackson. All considered themselves members of the same Democratic-Republican party.

Nominating procedures were unsettled. All but the Crawford forces opposed the usual congressional caucus for choosing candidates. Despite such rough waters, the Crawford managers insisted on pressing the caucus method. After several abortive attempts, a sparsely attended congressional conclave met in February, 1824 to nominate the Treasury Secretary for President by an overwhelming margin. The Crawford strategists hoped to secure Pennsylvania for their candidate by running Albert Gallatin of that state for Vice-President. Though unpopular with the Richmond Junto, Gallatin's nomination in the caucus was engineered by a substantial margin. In March, however, the Harrisburg Convention gave clear signs that this Pennsylvania tactic would fail; the state gathering nominated Andrew Jackson for President and John C. Calhoun for Vice-President. Calhoun decided to drop out of the presidential race to concentrate on the second office, thus providing another mark against the Crawford faction's approach to the vice-presidency (2). These factors, together with the smoldering discontent among some of the Crawford group,

led ultimately to a change in their policy in this area.

In the fall of election year the Georgian's party arranged to drop Gallatin from the ticket. The Crawford managers, however, were unable to decide on a more suitable candidate for several months after the caucus and, when Gallatin offered to withdraw in April, he was advised to stay in the contest with the provision that it might be desirable for him to retire later. By June, a close Pennsylvania associate of Gallatin was optimistic, but hopes were soon to vanish. (3)

During August, the Crawford party proposed to Henry Clay and his close associates a coalition in which the Kentuckian would receive backing for the second office in return for supporting Crawford for the top post. Though negotiators promised Clay the vice-presidency now and New England's support for the first office in the future, one advisor, Josiah S. Johnston, strongly urged him not to accept the offer, because by taking support for the second place he would be withdrawing as a presidential candidate. Some of the Crawford faction even turned to the "tears for what should have been" approach, saying they wished the Speaker had originally been nominated to run with their chief, but that Gallatin would now withdraw to make such a course possible. Johnston urged the Crawford group to give Clay enough support for the presidency to enable him to be a candidate if the election were thrown into the House of Representatives. If they failed, "Harry of the West" could then be the union candidate (4, 5).

Clay replied that, even if desirable, it

would be difficult to secure his election as Vice-President because it would be nearly impossible to persuade his western friends to switch their support to second place. If they would switch, there would be no way for them to agree on a new presidential candidate. Such circumstances ruled out any coalition. If he were to receive any vice-presidential support in the eastern states, it would have to be spontaneous and separate from the presidential question. If his friends wished to run him on their own and he were elected, the post would be accepted, provided, of course, he failed to win the first office. He would not seek the vice-presidency or coalesce with Crawford to gain it. Clay thus rejected the Crawfordites' offer, made through Johnston, by refusing to withdraw from the presidential contest to concentrate on second place (6).

Not easily discouraged, Crawford strategists continued to press their coalition plan upon the Clay group, hoping they would finally acquiesce when they saw the Georgian's support for Vice-President shifted to the Kentuckian. But Clay believed that Calhoun would win the second spot if only the eastern vote were transferred by such a coalition. Furthermore, much western sentiment had turned to Nathan Sanford as Clay's running mate. Although it was possible that Adams' men and the Crawford forces would support Harry of the West for the second office, enabling him to beat Calhoun, such a combination was extremely unlikely. Clay remained unwilling to form a coalition with the Crawford party to pursue an unlikely chance for the second office. By mid-September, Johnston thought the Crawford party would run the Kentuckian even without a coalition (7).

Martin Van Buren of New York, the Crawford group's northern leader, had decided that the Pennsylvanian should drop out of the race. Walter Lowrie broke the news to Gallatin in September. Since the Van Buren element, as well as various Crawford leaders in Virginia, were urging the substitution of Clay on the ticket, Lowrie advised his friend to withdraw. Gallatin replied he would not withdraw just to avoid defeat, but would gladly do so if by staying

it would hurt Crawford or prevent a better vice-presidential candidate from being elected. He decided to leave the decision to the Virginia committee of correspondence, and sent them a letter on October 2 declaring the end of his candidacy. The Crawford leaders in the Old Dominion accepted Gallatin's offer to withdraw and generally urged avoiding direct contact with Harry of the West; instead they asked the New York legislature to nominate him on the Crawford ticket. They hoped Clay would accept this action as decisive and act accordingly. However, the proposed nomination was never effected. Van Buren now had a tenuous grip on the legislature, as later proved by his failure to secure New York for Crawford, and Clay's friends refused to cooperate in such a project. Overruling those who wanted no consultation with Clay, the Little Magician decided to attempt one last trick to get Harry of the West to accept the coalition offer. Through Lowrie, Abner Lacock of Pennsylvania was deputized to make a direct pilgrimage to Clay on behalf of the New York Merlin. There was sufficient talk about the proposed Clay-Crawford coalition to launch a false rumor to the effect that Clay was withdrawing from the presidential contest to accept backing for the second office (8).

Having decided to retire, Gallatin thought the notice should be published soon. Therefore, about October 8, Lowrie wrote to Richmond and Albany, authorizing the publication of the candidate's statement of withdrawal. The information was soon printed in various papers, and some Crawford journals began to talk openly of supporting Clay for Vice-President, without his specific consent and in the absence of any significant nomination. Indeed, a number of the Crawford party in Washington decided to support Clay for Vice-President, but the Treasury Secretary's tacticians were unenthusiastic about the Kentuckian. In fact, Joseph Gales and William W. Seaton of the National Intelligencer favored leaving Crawford without a specific running mate. Gales and, apparently, the Georgian himself, preferred Nathan Sanford over Clay. The Kentuckian gave a clear negative to Van Buren's em-

sary, thus ending a one-sided flirtation, and the rejected suitors dropped plans to sponsor this political marriage by proxy. Though no uniform course was adopted, there were suggestions that Van Buren should be the new vice-presidential candidate. This course was implemented in Georgia, doubtless with Crawford's approval. The Crawford forces never endorsed a universal policy on the question of a running mate, and the scattered electoral votes later demonstrated this lack of agreement. Some of the Calhoun troops had attempted to forestall any movement toward Clay, but such effort proved unnecessary. Of Crawford's 41 electors, all but two vice-presidential tallies went for candidates other than Clay. Only the Delaware Crawford electors named the Kentuckian for the second office, while the rest were split among Van Buren, Jackson, Nathaniel Macon, and Calhoun (9). Thus, the attempt of the Crawford tacticians to use the second place on the ticket to attract major support for the first proved abortive. In this respect, their handling of the vice-presidential dilemma was but a microcosm of their total campaign effort.

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