

THE NELSON-KINDRED CAMPAIGN OF 1882¹

Although there have been many acrimonious political campaigns in Minnesota since territorial days, the Nelson-Kindred congressional contest of 1882, which resulted in the election of Knute Nelson to represent the "Bloody Fifth District," stands out as the most strenuous congressional campaign in the history of the state, and it is in some respects the most dramatic political struggle in the annals of Minnesota. A study of this campaign is desirable both for its intrinsic interest and for the light which it throws upon political practices in Minnesota in the early eighties.

The census of 1880 permitted an increase of two members in Minnesota's delegation in Congress, giving the state a total representation of five in the lower house. Before this time Minneapolis and St. Paul and all the territory to the north and across the state had been included in the Third Congressional District. As a result of the reapportionment of 1881, the northern half of Minnesota, comprising at that time twenty-nine counties, became the Fifth Congressional District. A line drawn from Big Stone City to St. Cloud and thence to the eastern boundary of the state would indicate the southern limits of this large district.

Many ambitious political leaders lived in the Fifth Congressional District, but it was generally understood, when the legislature made the reapportionment, that Charles A. Gilman of St. Cloud, who had served as speaker of the House of Rep-

¹Read at the annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, January 15, 1923. The author of this article, Mr. Elmer E. Adams, was graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1884. Since then he has resided at Fergus Falls, where for more than a quarter of a century he edited the *Fergus Fall Journal*. For seven years he was a member of the board of regents of the University of Minnesota. Since 1905 Mr. Adams has served in the state legislature during five sessions; thus he has a first-hand acquaintance with Minnesota politics.—*Ed.*

representatives and was then lieutenant governor, would be chosen congressman from the new district. He was not, however, the only man residing in the district who had congressional aspirations. In Duluth, for example, there was Colonel Charles H. Graves, afterwards speaker of the Minnesota House and minister to Norway and Sweden. Another man of prominence in the same city was Judge Ozora P. Stearns, who had served for a short time as a United States senator by appointment in 1871. Others who were justified in entertaining congressional ambitions were Solomon G. Comstock of Moorhead, who later represented the district in Congress for one term; Andrew McCrea of Perham, who had been state senator for Otter Tail County in 1879; Knute Nelson of Alexandria, a state senator from 1875 to 1878; Alphonso Barto of Sauk Center, lieutenant governor of the state from 1874 to 1876; and former Governor Horace Austin; not to mention still others whose political records were of sufficient importance to make them possible candidates.

In view of the large number of Minnesota public men who were available for the congressional post, it is not strange that the appearance of Charles F. Kindred of Brainerd as a contender for the Republican nomination came as a distinct surprise. Kindred, a parvenu in state politics, had come out from Pennsylvania some ten years earlier to be chief clerk in the land department of the Northern Pacific Railway Company, with headquarters at Brainerd. To understand the importance of this position it is necessary to recall that the lands received by this company from the national government were equivalent to a strip of territory forty miles wide across the state of Minnesota and eighty miles wide across the Territory of Dakota, and included numerous town sites along the line of the railway. The office in which Kindred was employed under the land commissioner's direction had charge of the management and sale of the company's lands. For a man of Kindred's type it was an ideal place for the making of money. The lands

to be sold were among the most fertile in Minnesota and Dakota. Prices ranged from three to ten dollars per acre. The publicity attendant upon the later congressional campaign revealed the fact that Kindred utilized every method of profiting at the expense of the company which he was serving and of the people who were buying its lands. Payment could be made in the preferred stock of the Northern Pacific Railway Company, and this stock could be purchased at fifteen cents on the dollar. A settler purchasing a quarter section of land at five dollars per acre would pay the company eight hundred dollars for it. He had the alternative, however, of going out and buying eight hundred dollars' worth of the company's preferred stock for one hundred and twenty dollars and paying for his land with the paper thus secured.

It was apparently Kindred's practice, when a settler came to buy a section or a quarter section of land, to go out and purchase the stock and turn this in to the company, either taking the settler's money or accepting a mortgage upon the land, drawing a good rate of interest and covering the full amount asked by the railway company. In this way he was able to enrich himself very rapidly. In 1881 his manipulations of the company's business had become so flagrant that a committee of the board of directors was appointed to investigate his acts. The subsequent report of this committee was made the basis of a law suit which, although it was compromised, forced Kindred to return to the Northern Pacific a large amount of money, said to be about seventy-five thousand dollars, although it may have been much more. In any event, during the time when he acted as chief clerk he probably accumulated a fortune of a quarter of a million dollars and also acquired possession of large holdings of choice lands. He had a famous stock farm near Valley City where important demonstration work was carried on.

Upon the organization of the fifth district Kindred announced his desire to be its representative in Congress, and in

1882 he entered upon an active campaign.² From the very start he made it clear that he was prepared to pay the necessary price for a seat in Congress. Indeed, it was one of the bits of gossip afloat during the campaign that, on the occasion of a visit to Cushman K. Davis, Kindred stated that he had one hundred thousand dollars to spend to secure the election. Davis is reported to have replied that the best way in which to get results would be to visit Alexandria, call on a certain Norwegian in that place, and persuade the latter to withdraw from the race, for if he ever started Kindred would never land in Washington. Kindred did not visit Alexandria and did not go to Washington, but he appears not only to have expended the hundred thousand dollars, but to have promised to pay nearly as much more. No corrupt practices act was in existence to limit the campaign expenses which an unscrupulous candidate might incur.

According to those who knew him Kindred possessed a pleasing personality. He was a big, strong, genial fellow, trained in the political methods in vogue in Pennsylvania at that time. After his defeat in the Minnesota campaign of 1882 he returned to his native state, where he was employed by the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company and was a leader in one of the large wards of Philadelphia. As soon as Kindred opened his campaign in the spring of 1882 for the Republican nomination the other candidates entered the field. They were Nelson, Graves, and Gilman. It soon became apparent, however, that the choice would lie between Kindred and Nelson or that a compromise candidate would be nominated.

After the creation of the new district the state central committee of the Republican party appointed a district committee which was to take charge of the party's interests until an or-

² His political career in Minnesota had been confined to acting as a delegate to the Republican national convention in 1880. It was expected that he would vote for the nomination of William Windom, but he gave his support to Grant for a third term.

ganization could be perfected by a party convention. This committee was composed of Colonel George H. Johnston of Detroit, chairman, Alphonso Barto of Sauk Center, S. G. Comstock of Moorhead, Judge Reuben Reynolds of Crookston, Lars K. Aaker of Alexandria, Adsit C. Hatch of Battle Lake, Howard C. Kendall of Duluth, Colonel C. B. Sleeper of Brainerd, and F. G. Tuttle of Ortonville.

The congressional convention was called to meet at Detroit on July 12. In considering the preparations made for this convention, the reader must remember that in the eighties no laws governed the actions of political parties. There were rules, to be sure, but even these were variously interpreted by political committees. The Australian ballot had not been adopted. At caucuses or conventions or even at general elections no official ballots were used. It was the business of the candidates to see that there were ballots at the voting places on the day of election and that their own names were upon these ballots. If by hook or by crook the ballots were removed, the voter had no way of casting his vote except by writing the names of the favored candidates on a piece of paper. The county committees called county conventions for the election of delegates to the district convention, but there was no regular time for the holding of these conventions nor were there any rules for the holding of caucuses to elect the township and village delegations to the county conventions. The result was that town committees might in some cases hold snap caucuses without encountering serious opposition. Early in the campaign of 1882 it became evident that Kindred proposed to win county delegations no matter what methods he had to employ.

A generation ago party "regularity" meant much more than it does in these days of independent voting and broken-down party lines. A man was not in good standing with his party unless he accepted the results of the caucuses and conventions and gave his support to those who were finally designated as nominees. After the fifth district Republican

convention in 1882, which will be described in this paper, two candidates claimed the nomination. Although most of the regular Republicans supported Knute Nelson, many who lived along the line of the Northern Pacific Railway gave their votes to Kindred.

As a matter of fact, Kindred's strength lay almost wholly in the Northern Pacific country. Travel north and south was far less common then than now, and consequently the area traversed by the railroad was almost isolated from the older and more settled territory to the south. Kindred had placed many men under obligation to him in his handling of the Northern Pacific lands, for he rendered favors to some while fleecing others. Speculators in land, who were eager to get the notes and examination reports which were in Kindred's charge, were numerous. He had aided many influential men in securing land and his favors had won for him a considerable legitimate support. The Brainerd region was solidly for him and he had a considerable following in and around Duluth.³ It is interesting to note in this connection that St. Louis County, which had not yet developed its great mining enterprises, sent only three delegates to the Detroit convention, whereas Otter Tail, the most influential county in the district, sent nine. Kindred was able to develop some strength before and after the convention by putting forward candidates for county and legislative offices where there was no opposition to the candidates supporting Nelson. In the Northern Pacific territory Kindred did not have to exert great efforts to get delegates, and so he started out to secure the delegations in the Nelson territory, where the population was very largely Norwegian.

The first real clash occurred in Norman County where Kindred had secured the support of Frederick Puhler, a newspaper editor in Ada and chairman of the county committee.

³ Among the most active supporters of Kindred were the two brothers, G. G. Hartley and W. W. Hartley of Brainerd, afterwards prominent throughout the state.

The latter issued a call for a county convention to be held in Ada on June 1. The call, which was formally issued on May 25, was published for the first time in Puhler's newspaper on the day before the convention. Puhler had hired all the teams in Ada in order to prevent the Nelson men from reaching the outside towns except on foot. It has been charged that he engaged teams and sent out men to get up snap caucuses for Kindred who himself came to Ada to help along the work. Of course no automobiles or telephones were available. Sharp practices notwithstanding, out of forty-three delegates who assembled on June 1 Nelson had twenty-eight, or a clear majority uncontested, Kindred had seven, and the remainder were contested.

Realizing their inexperience in political methods, the Nelson men held a rehearsal convention in the forenoon of the day on which the regular convention was to meet. They went through all the motions and proceedings of organization so that they would know what to do when the convention met at two o'clock in the afternoon. It has been alleged that the Kindred men attempted to buy off the Nelson delegates. Upon the failure of this attempt, Puhler ordered policemen at the door of the hall to admit only those who could show credentials received from him. But the Nelson contingent was too strong to be thus thwarted. As soon as the convention was called to order, the Nelson men nominated a chairman and Puhler refused to put the motion. A Kindred adherent was then nominated, and after putting the motion Puhler declared it carried. In the meantime a Nelson delegate put the motion for the nomination of one of his group who was then declared elected and who immediately took the chair. Puhler and his followers then left the hall and elected a delegation to Detroit. The Nelson forces completed the work of their convention.

This opening skirmish marked the beginning of a series of sharp clashes throughout the entire district, and in nearly every county two sets of delegates were chosen. By the press and people throughout the state it was generally conceded that

the Nelson delegates — save in three or four counties — had been regularly elected. Even Douglas County, Nelson's home county, was invaded by the Kindred men, but Colonel Sleeper tried in vain to secure a delegation from Alexandria. He was more successful in Stevens County. A lively row occurred at Hancock where Bronson Strain was chairman of the caucus. A wrangle between the two rival forces developed, during which a Kindred supporter hit the chairman in the eye with his fist. This was only one of the many pleasantries of the campaign which won for the district its name, "the Bloody Fifth." Sleeper also tried to carry the town of Morris for Kindred. The crews of two Northern Pacific gravel trains, stationed nearby, were brought in, but since the men were not residents they were not permitted to vote. This caused a contest, with the result that both Kindred and Nelson delegations were elected in Stevens County. In Morrison County Kindred was unable to win and Gilman secured the delegation. Nevertheless when the Detroit convention opened, a Kindred delegation from this county was on hand. Kindred had no success, however, in his attempts to carry Stearns County, the home of Gilman.

The convention in Otter Tail County numbered one hundred delegates, eighty-five of whom were for Nelson. Fifteen were for Kindred, who commanded some votes in the Perham district. The eighty-five met at the courthouse in Fergus Falls at the appointed time and elected nine delegates to the Detroit convention: George W. Boyington, Moses E. Clapp, H. E. Rawson, B. N. Johnson, Jacob Austin, Amund Levenson, A. C. Hatch, John G. Nelson, and Charles D. Baker. It will be noted that Otter Tail County had five more delegates than any other county in the district. The Kindred faction — fifteen in number — met at the Occidental Hotel and elected a delegation of nine to Detroit, none of whom, according to the Nelson men, were representative Republicans of the county.⁴ The

⁴ The delegation was composed of Frank Geoghagan, T. R. Williams, David L. Wellman, Theodore Anderson, E. L. Thomas, A. Scribner, Barney Griffith, L. A. Paddock, and John Gung.

Kindred delegates based their claim for a contest on the ground that the call did not state in what hall or building the convention was to be held. At the meeting in the courthouse, called by the chairman of the Republican county committee, Charles D. Wright, practically all the prominent Republicans of the county gathered. They were the men who had controlled and supported the party up to that time and who controlled it afterwards.

Considerable light on the situation is cast by the following comment of the *Fergus Falls Journal* for June 12, 1882:

Fergus Falls and Otter Tail County have been in the last few days witnesses of scenes of political corruption and dishonor fully equal to anything of which we have ever read, and worse than anything we have ever before seen. In comparison with it, Bill King's "strumpet of corruption" campaign has become respectable.

Enough has been said in previous issues of this paper to show our appreciation of Kindred's tactics in endeavoring to procure a false expression of public sentiment in this and other counties. He established a camp of corrupt strikers here at Fergus Falls a week ago, under the lead and direction of Puhler, the Norman county thief, who busily employed their time in endeavors to buy up a following in this city. A large bank account was submitted to heavy drafts every day. The largest saloon in the place was chartered, Kindred himself arrived Wednesday night, and all day Thursday he held a levee in the saloon or interviewed citizens in their back offices and at his hotel. In spite of all this work and of large amounts of money paid to individuals, in amounts of from \$10 to \$100 each, the caucuses of Fergus Falls on Friday evening were unanimous for Knute Nelson — money and whiskey had not produced even a ripple on the strong current of political sentiment in this place. Men had taken Kindred's money and then voted against him.

Nelson was in Fergus Falls on June 10, and after the caucuses, the crowd serenaded him at his hotel, and he delivered the following brief address:

Friends and Fellow Citizens: Allow me to thank you for the honor you have done me by carrying the caucuses in my favor. This has been in many respects a very peculiar campaign. Never in the history of this state or any part of it, have such means and

methods been resorted to to carry any nomination as are being used against me. I have not felt as if I were fighting for Knute Nelson, or any other little Norwegian, but for a principle.

You deserve credit for standing so firm against the influences that have been brought to bear. The great principle is not what man is to go to congress, but whether the office is to be put up at auction and knocked off to the highest bidder. (applause) If they had attacked my ability and suitableness, I would not speak; there are many men in this district, aye, here in Fergus Falls, plenty of congressional material, as able as I, and if the campaign had been conducted in the usual spirit I would not complain, but it has been put upon a money basis, and it is your duty to put your foot down. The question is whether none but a millionaire can go to congress, or whether you will allow yourselves to be knocked down with a bag of gold. (applause) You have stood well to your guns. As soon as it was decided to hold the convention at Detroit, Kindred endeavored to engage all the hotel room in that town, so as to exclude me and my friends. These tactics have been carried on every where but here they have amounted to only a flash in the pan. If I am nominated and elected, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, I will endeavor to "do the right as God gives me to see the right." (applause.)⁵

The situation in Fergus Falls was similar to that in other counties and, as the various conventions were held, it became perfectly apparent that the congressional convention at Detroit would be a political gathering worth attending. It will be noticed that the first county convention in the district was held on June 1 at Ada in Norman County. The Otter Tail County convention was held on June 10. Not until July 12 did the district convention meet. This wide range in the time of holding the county conventions allowed unusual and undesirable practices to creep in. During the ante-convention campaign Kindred was always very good to the correspondents and newspaper reporters and as a result the dispatches and reports did not carry a correct description of the situation as it was developing throughout the district. Not until the Detroit con-

⁵ The speech is printed in the *Fergus Falls Journal* for June 12, 1882. A few obvious misprints and errors in the newspaper report have been corrected.

vention had been held did the Republican organs of the state definitely take sides and declare editorially what policy the party ought to pursue. After the Detroit convention the *Daily Pioneer Press* of St. Paul, the *Tribune* of Minneapolis, and the *Duluth Tribune* came out strongly against the Kindred methods and were equally vigorous in their support of Nelson, using every available argument to further the latter's candidacy.

The congressional convention, to be made up of seventy-eight delegates, was called to meet at Detroit on July 12, 1882. Detroit was then a town of about fifteen hundred and its hotel and auditorium facilities were somewhat limited, hardly adequate for the regular delegates, not to speak of the contesting delegates and the crowd of spectators. The only hotel in the town which amounted to very much was run by an old soldier. A month before the convention Kindred had rented this entire hotel, but the landord had a fellow feeling for a comrade in arms and so he reserved one room for Nelson. When it became practically certain that two conventions would be held, the Nelson men secured a large circus tent for sleeping purposes — as they claimed — and had it erected immediately across from the hall where the convention was to be held. Large numbers of people came to Detroit for the convention. Kindred believed in music and so he had two bands on hand, one from Fargo and the other from Brainerd. Fearing a disturbance, he also brought a considerable number of special policemen from the same cities, and the adherents of Nelson were unkind enough to brand them as thugs. In any event they were there "to maintain order."

On July 11 the district committee met to plan a *modus vivendi* for the organization of the convention. Colonel Johnston, the chairman of the committee, claimed that he favored Nelson, but it was known by all that he was supporting Kindred. The committee failed to accomplish anything and consequently adjourned until the next morning at eight o'clock. On the morning of the twelfth the Kindred members of the

committee failed to appear and much time was spent in trying to assemble the committee. Finally it convened and a resolution embodying the names of the duly-elected delegates to the convention was offered. In this list the names of Kindred men appeared only for the Kindred counties. Colonel Johnston refused to put the resolution to a vote and announced that he would be governed by no instructions. Comstock, a member of the committee, then called for a vote, and the resolution was carried five to three. Colonel Johnston defied the committee, announcing that he would organize a convention according to his own ideas, whereupon the committee, adopting the only course left to it, deposed Johnston from the chairmanship by a vote of five to four and elected Barto in his stead.⁶ The deposition of Johnston made it apparent that there was going to be a lively row over the control of the convention hall. There was a rush to get possession of it and, although a large number of Kindred's special police were on guard, a good many of the Nelson men gained admittance.⁷ As Kindred had practically a full complement of contesting delegates, he had enough to make a full-sized convention of his own.

Barto, the new committee chairman, was a very fleshy man with a big heart and a large stomach, kindly in disposition, but

⁶ The question whether or not a committee had the right to depose a chairman in this manner was warmly discussed in the ensuing campaign. James G. Blaine, to whom the matter was referred, decided that a committee could remove the chairman. The editor of the *Tribune of Minneapolis*, General A. Bayard Nettleton, submitted the question to Edward McPherson, the parliamentarian of the national House of Representatives. McPherson's views coincided with those of Blaine. Senator Sumner had been removed as chairman of the Senate committee on foreign affairs because he refused to obey the committee's instructions, and Senator Cameron was elected in his place. Schuyler Colfax, speaker of the national House of Representatives and vice president under Grant, also supported the right of the committee to remove its chairman.

⁷ According to Harlan P. Hall the "Kindred men, to guard against accidents, had smuggled a force into the hall at 11 a. m., and they had lunch sent in and camped there. When the Nelson men marched in a body from the tent to the hall they were astonished to find all the front seats occupied." Hall, *Observations: Being More or Less a History of Political Contests in Minnesota from 1849 to 1904*, 287 (St. Paul, 1904).

a little easy and a bit groggy when it came to unusual activity in getting possession of a platform. When the delegates convened, Johnston and Barto both appeared on the platform. Each called for nominations for chairman of the convention. Neither stopped to read the call. One of the Nelson men nominated Comstock and Barto put the motion. At the same time one of the Kindred faction named Elon G. Holmes of Detroit for chairman and Johnston put this motion. Everybody voted aye, and thus both Holmes and Comstock were elected chairman.⁸ Both went to the stage and attempted to proceed with the convention's business, but from that time on pandemonium ruled.

Johnston announced that he had hired the hall in his own name and not on behalf of the committee. He therefore demanded that the Nelson men who were disturbing the convention should be put out of the hall. Comstock attempted to keep his position and Holmes ordered his arrest. The sheriff of Becker County made certain maneuvers and Comstock announced, "I yield to the majesty of the law." "The Nelson men," as Holmes puts it, "then withdrew to the tent which they had already prepared as their meeting place."

Harlan P. Hall, editor of the *St. Paul Globe*, which at that time was the Democratic organ of the state and a newspaper which always printed the things which the Republicans did not want printed but which the people liked to read, was present to report the convention. In his *Observations*, written some twenty years later, Hall said of this collision, known as the "duel convention":

Every one seemed to be yelling at the same time. Holmes and Comstock stood side by side and their respective adherents would rush to the front and make motions which the chairman would declare carried. After about five minutes of this scene, ex-

⁸ One report states that when Comstock was elected chairman, Soren Listoe of Fergus Falls, who was a Kindred supporter, called out to Kindred, who stood outside a window of the hall, "Comstock has been made chairman"; and an affidavit has been made that Kindred called back, "Clean him out and recognize but one chairman."

Sheriff Mertz, of Brainerd, a very resolute man and a warm friend of Kindred, jumped on the platform and, grabbing Comstock, tried to pull him off, saying, "You have no business here." It was scarcely a second before 30 or 40 men were on the stage to aid Comstock and Mertz respectively, and they were a good deal hustled about. Comstock stood his ground well and resisted being dragged off the platform, but did not strike a blow. The crowd had overturned the reporters' table and we had mounted an extemporized table to get a view of the fight. As the excitement was at its highest, crash went our table and we were all tumbled promiscuously to the floor. I believe that little accident was providential. It made a laugh, and laughter and anger are not close friends. It also diverted attention for a moment and by the time we had picked ourselves up from the floor, the sheriff, with 10 or 12 deputies, was on the platform commanding the peace and hustling men off the stage. . . . Johnson finally shouted an order to clear the stage of every one but the committee and the reporters. That would have removed both Holmes and Comstock. He said he had hired the hall and would have it cleared. On this announcement a Nelson man shouted: "I move the convention adjourn to the tent on the prairie." Comstock put the motion and declared it carried. . . . H. L. Gordon, of Minneapolis (not a delegate or even a resident of the district) mounted a chair and urged the Nelson, Graves and Gilman men to leave. A deputy sheriff grabbed him and escorted him to the door as a disturber of the peace.⁹

Comstock carried his right to be chairman to the tent and took charge of the Nelson convention. As neither chairs nor tables were available, it was a case of standing room only. The district committee had acted as a committee on credentials and the delegates named by them were given seats, but not chairs. There were representatives from twenty counties, leaving the eight counties which were unquestionably for Kindred unrepresented. A platform was adopted which breathed loyalty to the party and its principles and denounced Kindred. Halvor Steenerson of Crookston then nominated Knute Nelson, Colonel Daniel G. Cash presented the name of Colonel Graves, and Barto nominated Gilman. Graves and Gilman had remained in the race thinking that Nelson and Kindred

⁹ Hall, *Observations*, 288-290.

would so divide the delegates that a third man would be a necessity, but they had allied themselves with the Nelson wing. In the balloting Nelson received forty-four votes, Graves seven, and Gilman ten. Nelson was accordingly declared the nominee of the convention and made a speech of acceptance. Gilman, Graves, Hanford L. Gordon, and Albert Scheffer made ratification speeches, and the Nelson campaign was launched.

While Nelson was being nominated in the tent, the Kindred men were taking action in the hall. As Nelson's supporters were withdrawing from the hall, Holmes announced that the only regular convention would be in the hall, but no Nelson man halted. Colonel Sleeper nominated Kindred in a glowing speech and no other name was presented. The roll call gave him sixty-four votes, and he was declared the nominee. After both conventions were over, Nelson, in company with "Thundering" Gordon, called on Kindred at the latter's hotel, but the call was only formal, and after a few pleasantries they separated and the battle was renewed.

That evening was a lively one and a wild one in Detroit. The Volstead Act had not been passed and Detroit had always been wet. Kindred's brass bands paraded about the town with Kindred and Colonel Sleeper riding in a hack at the head of the procession. The women of Detroit, realizing that the crowd would have to be fed and desiring to make a little money for the cleaning up of the cemetery, held a supper, and it is said that Kindred, with his usual generosity, contributed one hundred dollars to the fund.

After the Detroit convention, there was a great deal of speculation as to what the Democrats in the district would do. The Democrats were never very strong in the Fifth Congressional District outside of Stearns County, the voters of which were so addicted to voting the Democratic ticket that they often voted against a Democrat if he was not properly labeled. The Kindred men were anxious that there should be no Democratic congressional candidate, for they expected the Democrats to vote for their candidate, who had received much Democratic support for his convention. The Nelson adherents,

while somewhat indifferent, preferred that a Democratic candidate should be put in the field. In any event a Democratic congressional convention was held at Fergus Falls on September 6. Colin F. Macdonald of St. Cloud presided. After the preliminaries, Sheriff M. Mickley of Stearns County nominated Edward P. Barnum of Sauk Center. Other names offered were Robert Miller of Otter Tail and R. C. Moore of Stevens. An informal ballot gave Barnum fifty out of eighty-eight votes. He was declared nominated and all efforts on the part of Kindred to get him out of the field were useless.

After the Detroit convention the two factions had become so embittered that there was no such thing as harmonizing them. The contest could only be settled at the polls. Much effort was expended in attempting to show which was the regular nominee. The first six weeks after the Detroit convention were spent in organizing and in preparing campaign materials, and thereupon the speech-making campaign began.

A Nelson campaign manual of about fifty pages, prepared by Gordon, a well-known political character and an able writer, was the most important political document of the campaign. It told the full details of Kindred's connection with the Northern Pacific Railway and its lands, and the history of his efforts to control the different county conventions. It also included an account of the Detroit convention and presented the opinions of parliamentarians regarding the regularity of the convention. The document was signed by Gilman, who, as chairman of the congressional committee, conducted the Nelson campaign.¹⁰ The Kindred forces got out a printed sheet containing various charges against Nelson which was supplied to speakers and newspapers. It charged Nelson with party irregularity, claim jumping, drunkenness, licentiousness, and other faults. In reply to the charge that Nelson had jumped the claim of a man when he came to Alexandria his friends

¹⁰ *An Address to the Voters of the Fifth Congressional District of Minnesota* (46 p.). Twenty-five thousand copies of this pamphlet were printed, but only two are now known to be in existence, one of which has been presented to the Minnesota Historical Society by Senator Nelson.

showed the contract by which he purchased and paid for a relinquishment of the land. They also sent to Wisconsin and got the proofs that he had not bolted a convention as was claimed. It is related that Judge John W. Willis of St. Paul, one of the leading Democratic orators of the state, spoke at Fergus Falls, and in his address he would first pick up the Kindred document and read about Nelson and then he would pick up the Nelson document and read about Kindred and, at frequent intervals, he would remark, "I don't know anything about either of the candidates but, if what they say about each other is true, then you ought to vote for Barnum, the Democratic candidate." ¹¹

Kindred could not get the support of as many newspapers as he desired and so he started three or four papers, one or two of them in the Norwegian language. It was at Kindred's instance, for example, that the *Fergus Falls Daily Telegram* was started, under the direction of H. P. Hall of the *St. Paul Globe*.

Although there were many speakers on the stump, Mr. Nelson carried the brunt of the campaign. He spoke in almost

¹¹ A circular printed in a Norwegian printing office in Fergus Falls and widely circulated sarcastically suggests the following reasons why Knute Nelson should be supported for Congress:

He is employed to drive the poor settlers off their lands after they have made valuable improvements on them.

He is the attorney for the Millers' association of Minneapolis, and through that corporation robs every wheat farmer of a portion of his crop when he brings it to market.

He stood on the fence when the bill came up in the legislature to extend the St. Paul and Pacific railroad through Otter Tail and Douglas counties until several thousand acres of land were transferred to him.

He has agreed to change his residence to Fergus in return for the support of the Fergus voters.

He is buying his way to congress, using more money and in the most corrupt manner ever known in American politics.

He is an infidel!

He don't believe in God!!

He don't keep his promises to man.

He is not an American!!

He persecutes church people.

He threatens to disrupt the republican party by running independently in case he cannot buy or bulldoze a regular nomination.

A copy of this circular has been presented to the Minnesota Historical Society by Senator Nelson.

every county of the great district, an arduous undertaking when one recalls the lack of transportation facilities in those days. He held his first meeting of the campaign on October 2 at Thomson, a village near Duluth. The gathering was held in a schoolhouse and, while he was speaking from the teacher's platform with the usual blackboard behind it, someone threw an egg at him, but Nelson quickly dodged it and it splashed against the blackboard. At a hall where Nelson spoke in Verndale, Wadena County, a trap had been made in the middle of the speaker's platform by the sawing out of the supports, so that when Nelson stepped upon that particular spot he would disappear underneath the platform. There was a big Norwegian lumberjack by the name of Hendrickson in the town who had been working with Clarence E. Bullard, who was making the arrangements. Before the meeting began, Hendrickson's Norwegian blood got the better of him and he told Bullard that if he allowed Nelson to step on the trap and go through it, he would thrash him within an inch of his life. This made such an impression on Bullard that he told Nelson to avoid stepping on a certain weak portion of the platform, and the meeting was conducted without disturbance. Such incidents show the character of the campaigning in those days. One Nelson meeting was held in Brainerd, Kindred's own stronghold. Nelson and thirty or forty of his supporters appeared on the platform before an audience composed entirely of Kindred adherents. Of the men on the platform Nelson was the only one who did not carry a gun. He said he had never carried one since the Civil War.

As the campaign progressed it became reasonably certain that Nelson would win. He had the support of all the candidates who had opposed him at Detroit save Kindred. He spoke in all the principal towns between St. Vincent and Duluth, arousing great enthusiasm in some places and bitterness in others. During the campaign there was widespread interest in Nelson's personality and a number of incidents which aroused the sympathy and support of the people were brought to light. A farmer wrote to the *Fergus Falls Journal*:

In the winter of '63 the 4th Wisconsin cavalry was stationed at Baton Rouge, La. I was a member of Co. G and Knute Nelson was a member of Co. B, and by his frank, manly, and fearless bearing so won the good will of all that he became a general favorite with officers and soldiers. One evening at "water call," as I was going to the river to water my horse, I saw a soldier of Co. E snatch a paper from a newsboy and gallop towards camp. Knute Nelson happened to be passing close by and hastily *paying the boy for the paper*, he started off on a gallop, overtook the Co. E. man and demanded the paper as his property. Nelson was hardly more than a boy at the time and I expected he would get into trouble as the other was a very rough fellow, but Nelson's fearless manner so cowed him that he gave up the paper and submitted to a lecture that ought to have made him a wiser and better man. The incident impressed me strongly at the time as showing the stuff the Norwegian boy was made of, and it would take a great deal to make me believe that Knute Nelson would stoop to trickery or double dealing. Let me say just here that I have not seen Mr. Nelson since the war, and have no interest in his election further than all should feel in seeing honest men elected to our national legislature.¹²

This is an example of many incidents which tended to popularize the "little Norwegian" with the people of his district.¹³ Generous as was Kindred, nothing that his adherents could do or say for him endeared him to the people or aroused that kindly feeling which Nelson enjoyed.

While Kindred was spending his money by the thousands there was undoubtedly the utmost poverty in the Nelson camp and Nelson himself says that he was even short of funds for the necessary expenses of the campaign. The writer found among some correspondence between Nelson and several residents of Ada, Norman County, a letter and a reply which throw light on the situation in the Nelson camp. Alexander Running of Ada had engaged Knute Sandvig to render some

¹² The writer of this letter, which is published in the issue of the *Journal* for September 14, 1882, was S. V. Beebe, who resided in St. Olaf township, Otter Tail County.

¹³ The phrase "little Norwegian" was first used by Kindred. The adherents of Nelson made capital out of the sneer, pointing out that Nelson was "American in heart and interest," and that he "fought for the land of his adoption."

service for Nelson. The money to pay Sandvig was very slow in arriving and the latter wrote a letter to Nelson urgently requesting payment. Nelson explained in his reply that as soon as he returned to his home after the Detroit convention he attempted to raise money to meet the bills which had been incurred. "I am now glad to say," he writes, "by reason of the sale of a piece of land yesterday, I am able to send the money to Mr. Running which I hope he has received by this time. . . . I regret that my means are so limited that I could not pay on a moment's notice but I feel conscious of doing the best, the very best I could." The total amount of Running's bill, including the Sandvig and other items, was \$98.40. Senator Nelson states himself that it is his opinion that not more than five thousand dollars was spent by the committee and by all others in behalf of his candidacy. A tremendous amount of effort, energy, and good will was put into the contest gratuitously by those who were friendly to Nelson and who were angered by the crude methods used by Kindred and his adherents.

Governor Lucius F. Hubbard was prevailed upon by Kindred's legal advisor, Cushman K. Davis, to establish some voting precincts in the pineries north of Aitkin and Grand Rapids. This caused the Nelson people to fear that there would be illegal voting in these localities, in as much as election regulations were crude. There was no adequate registration nor were there any regular forms of ballots. The lumber precincts were recognized as Kindred precincts and the returns were delayed for several days. In order to circumvent possible frauds, C. A. Gilman of St. Cloud, Alfred B. Brackett of St. Paul, and Ole Amundson of Evansville, went north to the pineries to watch the returns. It was charged that the Kindred men were holding back these returns until they could learn how large a majority they had to overcome in the counties to the south. As returns, even in the older settlements, came in slowly, this naturally meant delay. When the returns did come in, however, the majority for Nelson was so large that the Kindred forces gave up the struggle. They realized that

they could not secure from the pine precincts a large enough vote to overcome the majority in the district as a whole. When the returns from Itasca County finally came in they stood: Nelson, 2; Barnum, 8; Kindred, 683. The final vote for the district gave Nelson a majority of 4,718 over Kindred. The results were: Nelson, 16,956; Kindred, 12,238; and Barnum, 6,248. All the western counties were carried by Nelson. Barnum carried Stearns County. Kindred had majorities in Mille Lacs, Morrison, Wadena, Crow Wing, Aitkin, Carlton, Cass, and Itasca counties.

No national issues had played important parts in the campaign. Some reference was made to the tariff issue, but practically all the time was taken up in discussing the quarrel between the two factions. When the contest was over no issue had been settled except that the people of Minnesota would not knowingly allow anyone to buy his way into the halls of Congress. The career of Kindred was terminated so far as Minnesota was concerned and the door of opportunity was opened to Knute Nelson, whose public service to the state as congressman, governor, and senator was to span almost a half century.¹⁴

ELMER E. ADAMS

FERGUS FALLS, MINNESOTA

¹⁴ It is of historical interest to note that Kindred died recently in Philadelphia. Senator Nelson, Mr. Comstock, Mr. Holmes, Mr. Gilman, and Colonel Graves, all of whom were prominent during the campaign, are alive today, and the writer has been in communication with them in connection with the preparation of this paper. Several important documents received by the writer from Senator Nelson have been presented to the Minnesota Historical Society. Of these the most interesting is, perhaps, a memorandum book kept by Mr. Nelson during the campaign, containing miscellaneous notes and jottings and an "epitome of speech" which apparently was the basis of many of the speeches delivered by the candidate between October 1 and November 6, 1882. An accompanying paper lists the places—thirty in all—at which Mr. Nelson spoke. A series of important letters in his correspondence with Alexander Running of Ada throws light on the financial difficulties encountered by Mr. Nelson. Another item of interest is a copy for November 2, 1882, of *Tiden*, a Kindred organ published in the Norwegian language at Fergus Falls.



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