

THE BLACK EAGLE COMES TO COKATO

by Mike Worcester

Each fall, from 1903 through 1915, the Cokato Street Fair took place. We have written about those before. We also have two files of images from those events. One of those images came to us in July 1996. It was an undated postcard view of a speaker at one of the fairs. The image, seen below, showed how community events in those days functioned. The caption reads: "SPEECH, BY, SEN. M.E. CLAPP, "COKATO FAIR" COKATO MINN."



Questionable punctuation aside, the caption was intriguing as the author of this article, despite thinking he had extensive knowledge of Minnesota political history, had never heard of Senator M. E. Clapp. Thankfully there was a copy of the Minnesota Legislative Manual nearby (it was 1996, no Internet yet) and sure enough, there he was — "Moses E. Clapp, Republican: January 23, 1901 to March 4, 1917".

Born in Delphi, Indiana on May 21, 1851, Clapp and his family moved to Wisconsin at an early age, where he graduated from the University of Wisconsin Law School in 1873. In 1882, he moved to Fergus Falls to establish a legal practice. His legal and oratorical skills did not go unnoticed, and friends of legendary Minnesota Senator Knute Nelson, worked to secure Clapp as the Republican nominee for Attorney General of Minnesota in the 1886 election. One of the candidates Clapp bested for the nomination was Frank B. Kellogg (remember that name).

After three terms in the A.G.'s office — terms in those days were two years, not four — Clapp moved back into private practice, this time in St. Paul. His eloquence kept him busy on the Republican speaking circuit, and he stood for nomination for governor in 1896, but was not successful.

Five years later, U.S. Senator Cushman Davis died in office, presenting another opportunity for Clapp.

How U.S. senators were chosen at the time is quite different from the modern era. As proscribed in Article I, Section III of the U.S. Constitution, Senators were to be chosen by the legislatures of each state. When a vacancy came due, the majority caucus of the legislature would choose their candidate. As such, the Republican caucus in the met to fill out the remainder of Davis's term. Out of six hopefuls for the office, Clapp was chosen and began his service on January 23, 1901.

During his time in the Senate, Clapp, whose nickname was "The Black Eagle" became known as an expert on the affairs of Chippewa Indians and reservations in general. For many years he chaired the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. He was also known for being a Progressive Republican, part of a group of senators led by Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin. One of the items supported by these Progressives was tariff reduction. They were opposed to protectionism and tariffs, publically exhorting President Theodore Roosevelt and his successor, William Howard Taft, to oppose them also. Their efforts were not successful however as the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act of 1909 was passed by congress and signed into law.

It was during this time that Clapp made his appearance in Cokato.

While the *Enterprise* did not have a full text of his remarks, they did summarize them (seen highlighted at right), noting how he spoke extensively about the tariff issue.

One of the many other causes of the Progressives was the direct election of Senators. They felt that having Senators chosen by the legislature was undemocratic; that the people should have the say.

Years of effort paid off with the passage and ratification of the 17th Amendment, which stated that as the terms of sitting senators ended, those seats were to be filled by a vote of the people. For Clapp, that time arrived in 1916. Before standing on the general election ballot, he had to secure the nomination of the Republican party. He was not alone in that effort. Challenging Clapp were Charles Lindbergh, former governor Adolph Eberhardt, and Frank B. Kellogg.

Kellogg won the nomination — and later the general election — ending Clapp's career as a senator. Politics, it seems, it not without a sense of irony. Clapp was done in by the very act, the 17th Amendment, which he had so vigorously championed.

Following that election, Clapp retired to Washington D.C., where he once again took up the practice of law. He died on March 6, 1929, and is buried in the Fort Lincoln Cemetery, Brentwood, Maryland.

Sources for this article include: the archives of the Otter Tail County Historical Society; *A History of the Office of the Attorney General, State of Minnesota*; and the *Cokato Enterprise*, 14 October 1909.

Right: Moses E. Clapp, c1910 (Getty Images).

COKATO, WRIGHT COUNTY, MINNESOTA, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1909.

years' state fair, under the supervision of J. W. Beckman. Owing to lack of space it could not be given the same showing as what it made at the state fair, but as it were, it was very favorably commented on.

This hall also contained the Wright County Schools exhibit which was the first attempt at such. It had everything to make the display complete in the line of agricultural products. It also displayed to some extent what is doing at the local school in the line of manual training, girls home work and cookery. The school exhibit was aside from the regular fair entries in that certain rules had to be followed, in that an exhibitor would have to be a student of some county school and the agricultural selection had to be his or her own selection from their own garden, or if they did not have one of their own, they would be allowed to select from their parents garden or field.

Thursday was given to the placing of exhibits and no regular program of amusements had been arranged. It had been promised that Congressman C. A. Lindbergh would make an address, but at the last moment he was unable to come. On Friday a band concert and open air attractions made up the forenoon's amusement. As this was butter-makers and dairymen's day there were many from around the county in attendance.

The afternoon program was opened with a speech by United States Senator Moses E. Clapp, on the Broadway platform. He spoke but a few minutes in a plain way to the large audience. In his remarks he touched upon the tariff question and which he considers "the most stupendous question that has ever confronted the American people since the civil war. It is a question that no one seem to have a right solution to, and to make matters worse, factions have sprung up that have made it next to impossible to get relief that was intended at the last session of congress."

In his more characteristic mood he told us of the happy (?) days of his childhood. In particular the time when threshing time came around before they had the steam power, self feeder or the blower. It was then that he was assigned the job of "straw boss" in the tail end of the separator and to keep the straw from choking the works. "It was no easy job" he said, "but it was neither an easy job to keep a good man down, and finally when I had had my swing at the straw, I progressed to that of power boss. I then imagined that I was boss of all I surveyed, but what a hard climb. When I was a buckin' that straw on some hot afternoon I could have sworn to that the sun never moved for three solid hours."

He spoke in his free, open hearted way, and which was enthusiastically received. It was a straight talk with no kinks and seemed to have come from the inspirations of the moment. Mr. Clapp is one of our most able Senators in Congress and always did what he could to better conditions in his home state as well as that of others. It was a great treat to those who heard him speak.

Mr. French, of the state dairy and food department, was the next speaker of the afternoon and was introduced by the president of the county association Mr. Moore, of Maple Lake. He spoke of the dairy interests and what pertains to good dairying. His address was also brief but to the point. Messrs. Schilling, Sorenson and Sondegaard also made short addresses.

Friday night it started to rain and an off and on drizzling kept on all night. In the early morning of Saturday it looked as if it would clear, but after a pause the rain came and continued thruout the day. The weather for the two previous days was ideal and this sudden change came as a surprise. The farm work on outlying farms is not finished and this rain stopped proceedings in that direction, and it is said that the people came to town to spend the day as long as they could not do their work at home. The others that did not have the work to do came anyway and made up the big attendance.

Julius A. Schmahl, secretary of state, came up on the forenoon train

