

---

# A Practical Politician: The Boss Tactics of Matthew Stanley Quay

*William Alan Blair*

The Pennsylvania State University,  
University Park

During the 1880s, the Pennsylvania Republican leadership faced and survived a serious challenge. The decade opened with a national convention that engendered revolt within the Republican machine. Many of the disaffected felt oppressed by the heavy-handed rule of the Camerons. Simmering resentment boiled over in 1880 as the Camerons pushed for the nomination of Ulysses S. Grant to a third term as president.<sup>1</sup> The next year, a reform movement called the Committee of One Hundred formed in Philadelphia. By 1882, a Democrat became governor in Pennsylvania; two years later, another Democrat gained the White House. In this time of uncertainty, a politician named Matthew Stanley Quay emerged from the shadow of Simon and Don Cameron to restore the state Republican party to power and preserve the machine's dynasty.

At the time, Quay also faced an uncertain political future. As secretary of the Commonwealth, he had directed state affairs while Simon Cameron, followed by his son J. Donald, sat in the U.S. Senate. By 1884, the fifty-one-year-old Quay had dropped out of state office and lost an election for U.S. Congress. He stood to lose even more. Simon Cameron forsook the 1884 national convention, leaving his voting proxy not with Quay but with Chris Magee, a political boss in Pittsburgh. Many read this as a sign that Cameron had selected a new lieutenant.<sup>2</sup>

Quay received the same message. Asked to interpret Cameron's action, Quay replied, "It means a fight for self-protection and self-preservation."<sup>3</sup> Quay's background equipped him well for such a battle. The strategy for regaining power combined Cameron techniques with Quay's own skill and audacity at using the resources of a boss. His rise to power also reflected the desire of Pennsylvania Republicans for a supple leader, more capable of bending than the younger Cameron.<sup>4</sup>

This article examines how Quay used money and patronage as the foundation for gaining and maintaining power. The techniques suggest how practical politicians in the post-Civil War era practiced their trade.

## POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Matthew Quay's political odyssey began in a small rural community northwest of Pittsburgh. Before the Civil War, he won a seat in the Pennsylvania house as a representative from Beaver County. During the war, his organizational skill



as Assistant Commissary General of Pennsylvania caught the eye of Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin. After Quay distinguished himself at Fredericksburg, earning the Congressional Medal of Honor as colonel of the 134th Pennsylvania Volunteers, Curtin tapped him as a personal aide in answering all soldier letters. Quay proved helpful in establishing Curtin's reputation as an ombudsman for Pennsylvania soldiers. The Colonel also learned a great deal: the personal letters Quay penned for the governor would become part of a future boss's campaign methods.<sup>5</sup>

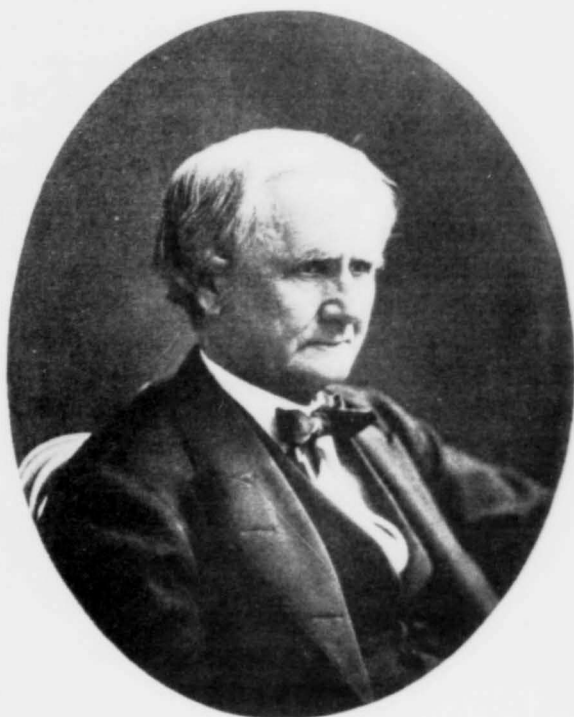
As war wound down, the balance of political power shifted in Pennsylvania. Curtin and U.S. Rep. Thaddeus Stevens should have emerged from the conflict with a tight rein on the party. Instead, Simon Cameron seized control in a remarkable political recovery. It was only 1862 when Cameron had been forced to resign as Secretary of War; by 1867, the Pennsylvania Legislature sent him to Washington as U.S. Senator.<sup>6</sup>

During his political recovery, Cameron had built a political machine from the ground up, meshing township, county, and city organizations into the gears of power. The machine would run for more than fifty years, lasting through Quay and then Boies Penrose until 1924. One historian judged Cameron as the prototypical boss who exercised control of political power without public responsibility.<sup>7</sup> Others credit the Cameron-Quay-Penrose organization as "so successful and long-lived that more than any other organization it deserved the title 'machine', which expressed the mingled hatred, despair, and admiration of its enemies."<sup>8</sup> As a U.S. Senator from a state with the second largest number of electoral votes, Cameron held the ear of President Ulysses S. Grant and managed to place son J. Donald as secretary of war at the end of Grant's second term.

In 1867, the power shift caught Quay off guard. He had tried to become speaker of the house in the state legislature. But Curtin's power had eroded too much. Instead, Cameron's candidate was elected—an important step toward his controlling enough legislative votes to win election to the U.S. Senate. Quay quickly read the political winds: he moved for a unanimous approval of Cameron for U.S. Senator in the 1867 Republican caucus.<sup>9</sup>

For the next decade, Quay was a Cameron aide, sharing administrative duties for the state with Treasurer Robert W. Mackey. In 1877, Cameron became angry at Rutherford B. Hayes, who refused to keep the younger Cameron in the cabinet. Hayes had mistrusted the Pennsylvanian's influence in the Grant administration.<sup>10</sup> In reaction, Simon resigned in mid-term and had the legislature elect Don as successor. The son, as iron-willed as his father, lacked smoothness. His coarse, straightforward style provoked a rebellion.<sup>11</sup>

By 1881, Independent Republicans—particularly Philadelphia's Committee of One Hundred—grew in power under the banner of reform. The committee wanted to break the Cameron machine. By 1882, it appeared as if the job had been accomplished. The Independents bolted even though the machine candidate for governor, James Addams Beaver, was a respected Civil War veteran. The



*Simon Cameron*

*Simon Cameron*

split opened the door to Democrats, who won the election with Robert Pattison.

Discord within the Republican ranks continued: neither Simon Cameron nor Quay attended the national convention in 1884. Cameron appeared to be looking for a new leader. Mackey was dead. The younger Cameron, while certainly a force, was not a leader. Penrose was only a year out of Harvard. Most power in Republican circles seemed concentrated in the cities of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, but so was at least one reform movement. In these uncertain times, Quay planned a strategy that required all the resources of a practical politician.

## MONEY AND PATRONAGE: THE BASIC RESOURCES

Many people touring Harrisburg in the latter part of the nineteenth century would have assumed that the Capitol building was the center of political power in Pennsylvania. But for more than 30 years, a little red building at the north end of Capitol Hill served as the true seat of power.<sup>12</sup> Some called it the State treasury; many knew it as Matthew Quay's checking account.

Quay freely raided the treasury. By controlling the office, he dispensed favorable loans to party faithful or to those needing persuasion. He also used the funds to buy votes or newspaper opinion. Quay attached considerable importance to this resource: "I don't mind losing the governorship or a legislature now and then," he said, "but I always need the state treasuryship."<sup>13</sup>

Quay did not pioneer this form of robbery. The practice had been common, especially when treasurers were still selected by the legislature. By the 1880s, circumstances changed somewhat. Thereafter, the people elected Pennsylvania's treasurer. Stealing became more subtle. Certain banks—usually those with directors who were in the machine—were favored with deposits by the treasury. The amount served as a draft that the boss and favorites drew against, without interest charges. They would, in turn, use the funds for personal or party investments. If all went well, they could return the principal to the bank and pocket the earnings. Laws then did not mandate that banks pay interest to the state.<sup>14</sup>

Quay usually made deposits in Philadelphia, particularly at the People's Bank where municipal boss John McManes was president. A rival Republican politician estimated that Quay's raids yielded "a campaign fund of not less than \$100,000, at the same time mortgaging influential bankers and affording unlimited credit to borrow vast sums for personal campaigns. . . ."<sup>15</sup> Even Penrose, someone from within Quay's camp, once told a colleague, "Mr. Quay made it his policy to keep at least one hand on the public purse. Only once in twenty years was there a state treasurer [Quay] could not control while he was in power. That state treasurer was Matthew Stanley Quay."<sup>16</sup>

A more subtle system featured the state's sinking fund for redeeming bonds. Pennsylvania had a general fund and a sinking fund, the latter distributed to banks paying 2 percent interest. The state would redeem these bonds for 4 percent. The difference in interest rates created a nest egg for the machine.<sup>17</sup> By 1887, when Quay was in the Senate, the system was in full swing. He telegraphed Governor Beaver: "It is evident that the treasury intend to reduce the price of our securities and I think the sinking fund Commissioners should sell and call for our fives. The tender at Washington ought to be made promptly. This will ease up matters in Phila."<sup>18</sup>

Quay speculated often. But such gambling brought risk. Twice, he was the focus of a scandal that entailed the suicide of the participants. In 1880, the machine appointed a Quaker as treasurer. In an audit, he found a shortage of \$260,000 from a Quay investment scheme that had soured. A cashier named Walters killed himself. Quay never denied his connection. He paid back \$160,000 of his own money; the rest came from the Camerons. Eventually, he cleared his debt.<sup>19</sup>

The situation repeated itself in 1898. Using a deposit of one million dollars in state funds, Quay wanted John S. Hopkins, cashier of the People's Bank of Philadelphia, ready to produce up to \$600,000 to purchase shares of Metropolitan Traction of New York. Buy orders went out until only \$10,000 remained. When

the investment collapsed, the bank failed. The despondent cashier put a bullet through his head, leaving behind a particularly damaging letter from Quay: "If you buy and carry a thousand Met for me I will shake the plum tree." This tree was the treasury.<sup>20</sup>

Other means of raising money included taking advantage of public offices. The machine at one point restored the job of recorder for Philadelphia, giving Quay a position worth \$30,000 per year.<sup>21</sup> The party also assessed patronage employees a percentage of salary, like a tithe, to maintain the machine. When laws prohibited such a shakedown, the demand became a request—a difference of semantics. Outright bribery could also be effective. The Colonel kept card files known as "Quay's Coffins" on which he recorded useful information about individuals: promises made, personal indiscretions, and the like. He jokingly called these his "revenue producers." He also routinely held party fund-raisers that he termed "fat fries"—events to fry the excess fat, or cash, from the party faithful.<sup>22</sup>

The money was essential for buying votes and maintaining campaign expenses. If a boss did not own a newspaper, he needed to offer bribes to control opinion. One subordinate explained how the price for such service varied by newspaper:

... I personally visited the Republican editors of our county during the past week, and find we can secure the active support of the "Daily Republican" for \$200, the "Coatesville Times" for \$50, "Spring City Sun" without cost. ... Of course, I did not connect you in any way with my visit when in conversation with the editors of the above papers, but led them to believe should any material aid be forthcoming, it would come from an entirely different source than yourself. ...<sup>23</sup>

Patronage was another resource. Friends and enemies alike knew Quay was particularly adept in this realm.<sup>24</sup> Many choice positions were in the Post Office which, nationwide, entailed more than 50,000 jobs. Postmasters were swept in and out of office as the parties changed.<sup>25</sup> But the boss also controlled other federal posts. Simon Cameron had six thousand federal offices to dole out. These included collector of the Port of Philadelphia, collectors of Internal Revenue, U.S. Attorneys, and Marshals.<sup>26</sup>

On the state and county levels, Quay oversaw appointments to such jobs as recorder of deeds, clerk of courts, city commissioner, and prothonotary. John Wanamaker, former Postmaster General under Harrison and a Republican rival, estimated in 1898 that the boss controlled 14,705 jobs with an annual payroll of \$7,608,911.<sup>27</sup> The figures may overstate the case, but they indicate the scope of patronage associated with a large state such as Pennsylvania.<sup>28</sup> Many jobs, particularly those of collectors of revenue, involved fees that could be raked for personal gain. Members of a reform movement estimated that in the early 1870s, the

recorder of deeds of Philadelphia was making \$80,000 and the office of receiver of taxes, \$85,000. Small wonder that one of the reformers said, "A period of six or seven years as receiver of taxes or city treasurer, it has been demonstrated, is sufficient to elevate a man from condition of poverty in an humble dwelling owned by somebody else, to a state of affluence on a fashionable street in an imposing establishment owned by himself."<sup>29</sup>

Requests for jobs litter the papers of politicians of this era. Quay was no exception. His correspondence with Governor James Addams Beaver invariably dealt with two subjects: getting elected and putting people into office. Both were inseparable functions of the boss and, with building a war chest, demanded constant attention.

Ironically, by the turn of the century, the patronage system became a burden to bosses. Senators had consolidated their state power base and relied less on patronage. Some even supported civil service legislation to end the incessant nagging that made one politician wonder if his job was "to legislate, or procure employment."<sup>30</sup> Quay himself knew that rewarding one man would anger others who wanted the job. Patronage pressures became so extreme that for one post with 20 applicants, Quay cut a deal with the governor. The senator submitted each name; the governor, who had his own choice suitable to Quay, rejected them all. That way, none could be angry with Quay.<sup>31</sup>

But there was no doubt of the value of patronage. In a dispute over some minor functionary, Russell Harrison counseled his presidential father to be wary of Quay and bargain with the Senator over a particular appointment. Young Harrison did not like Quay's choice, calling the person "a common ward politician without reputation or standing."<sup>32</sup> He had missed the point. Reputation or standing were unimportant. Quay's Pennsylvania opponents on the Committee of One Hundred knew the real talent of such a person: "Hordes of men are employed in the various departments who are unnecessary, being useful only as a sort of hot-house product which will ripen and be ready to be served up about election time when votes are needed."<sup>33</sup>

## PERSONAL STYLE: CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE

By all accounts, Quay was not an imposing figure: only five-feet, nine-inches tall and seemingly shorter. Heavy-lidded eyes and drooping mustache added to a figure of slouching disinterest. He read the classics and had a fine library. He also departed from the oratory of Senate leaders before the war. Publicly, he rarely delivered speeches. Except for one occasion, his addresses in *The Congressional Globe* rarely exceeded one column. Friends thought him charming and approachable, though they knew he could erupt with sudden ferocity.<sup>34</sup>

As Quay rose to the U.S. Senate in 1887, even the opposing Democratic press gave grudging acknowledgement to the man who would be boss: "He is neither orator nor a debator, but a man of good practical sense, an excellent

judge of human nature, and is always loyal and true in his friendships."<sup>35</sup> "Practical" meant the state's new boss did whatever it took to become elected; "loyal" meant rewarding through patronage party faithful who had been of service. Frank Willing Leach, Quay's personal secretary, hinted that others in the party could sense a difference from Don Cameron: "There was a general feeling that Colonel Quay was nearer the people. . . ."<sup>36</sup>

A practical politician had to be adept at reading the political winds—both of voters and of factions within his party. Wanamaker pointed out that Quay may have theoretically overseen 14,000 or more positions, but it is unlikely the Senator could control all. He had to appease segments of his power base, particularly municipal bosses in larger cities. To stay in control, he had to know when to drop personal priorities dangerous to party unity.

For various reasons, Quay did not do this in 1890, with disastrous results. While facing media criticism for his treasury dealings, the Colonel tried to force a choice for governor. The national pressure, coupled with opposing forces from the cities, cost his candidate, and the party, the election. Quay needed to control key components in a state. What he could not manage, he would set against each other so they would not unite against him.<sup>37</sup>

Quay never eliminated the threat from these factions. In 1895, he wrote William McKinley: "There is no antagonism to you anywhere in Pennsylvania, except from the alliance Harrison seems to have made with the municipal thieves of the two great cities of our state."<sup>38</sup> The best he could do was unite their self-interest with his or keep them at bay. To do so, Quay employed silence and diversion rather than direct frontal assaults.

Simon Cameron had first taught Quay the lesson of approaching men individually, asking for commitments in private that might not be forthcoming in public. The approach, termed "divide and conquer," proved effective.<sup>39</sup> Only once, early in his career, did Quay make a public outburst that appeared merely to vent his spleen. In 1870, he denounced a foe and supporters as "fifteen bastards." He was quickly reprimanded by Mackey, who wrote: "What the devil is the matter with you? Has the late election upset you or have you concluded to stay in Beaver the balance of your life?"<sup>40</sup> Quay took the counsel to heart. He rarely spoke in public or even appeared in the Senate. He arranged legislation through one-on-one sessions, keeping a careful tally of votes. When he had enough support to win, he would introduce a bill. Only once did he break this pattern in a big way: from April 14 to June 16, 1894 he spoke for 14 legislative days in a filibuster to win an amendment for bar iron in the Wilson tariff.<sup>41</sup>

Quay also pioneered the tactic of the personal letter. Whenever in need, he would send direct appeals to county chairmen, local bosses, and even college presidents as he sought support for candidates or money.<sup>42</sup> Through those letters he gained commitments. He also saved his correspondence for use in the future. In 1860, Curtin wrote a letter asking Quay for support in the campaign for governor. Years later, Quay resurrected the letter and sent it to Curtin with the fol-

lowing scrawled on it: "I am a candidate for the State Treasury. I will appreciate your support."<sup>43</sup>

Working behind the scenes gave Quay the advantage of maneuver and surprise. Rarely did opponents know the true strategy until too late. Often, this silence was coupled with deliberate indirection; Quay would offer a target to distract the opposition. Penrose summarized Quay's thinking: "Give them something to talk about and keep them talking. That way they'll always be six months or maybe a year behind you."<sup>44</sup>

Later in his career, Quay used indirection on voters. In 1895, he donned the mantle of reform, calling for an end to the "municipal thieves" who had upset him earlier. He openly called for reform to prevent enslavement of public officials, demanded that public office should be for public benefit, and wanted no public employees to influence primaries or be assessed a portion of their salary for political expenses. He even pushed for four bills that passed. Characteristically, they left enough loopholes to allow all of the practices to continue.<sup>45</sup>

Quay also proved he was adaptive. At least twice he came to national conventions wanting to support a candidate unpalatable to the party. Both times he backed down. In the 1880 campaign, he also found himself supporting a candidate he knew could not be elected, but who was supported by the Camerons. He wrote an unnamed correspondent in 1879, "I am not a Grant man but recognize the popular sentiment and the necessities of the times."<sup>46</sup> Quay would not let emotions cloud his judgment. After Republicans regained power, he opposed a clean sweep of Democrats from office. He also gave governors such as James Addams Beaver, Samuel J. Pennypacker, and William A. Stone latitude in selecting their cabinets.<sup>47</sup> And by 1898 he offered the peace branch to the former "municipal thieves" who could pick their own governor provided he would be returned to the U.S. Senate. Neither party nor personality was the final measure of a man—only that those in office would do what he wanted.<sup>48</sup>

The Colonel also knew the value of controlling conventions. To keep opponents off balance, Quay called snap conventions at an unexpectedly early date—usually when his own plans had matured but before his opposition could organize. He used people throughout the state to conduct canvasses, almost the way modern pollsters predict support.<sup>49</sup> He also carefully chose who would attend conventions, making sure—as he once evaluated two men for Beaver—such people would "go with us and do what is advisable."<sup>50</sup> At national conventions, Quay would enforce the unit rule—all delegates voting in one voice, either that of the boss or a subordinate. States such as Pennsylvania, with a significant electoral vote, maintained a strong bloc. Quay would gain further prestige and power in the national arena. And the patronage machine would be greased.

To marshal the public to the Republican camp, Quay merged special interests with the machine. He was particularly adept at coalescing soldiers around him and his party. In the national campaign of 1888, he mobilized veterans to distribute "documents" that stressed the Republican association with veterans.<sup>51</sup>



This led another state boss to say: "He knew that success depended, many times, on the smallest faction, and he was constantly after that faction."<sup>52</sup>

## STRATEGY OF 1885

Don Cameron, Quay's rival, was a beanpole of a man who towered over Quay. But with the Republican Party in chaos in the early 1880s, Quay emerged from the Cameron shadow to seize control. Personality favored Quay. He was more adaptive, even-tempered, and level-headed than the younger Cameron. Rebellion within the party had come largely because of the brusque style of Don Cameron, beginning with his dictate to support Grant for a third term in 1880. By 1882, Beaver—a genuinely well liked and excellent candidate—lost the race for governor because the party bucked to shake off the Cameron yoke.<sup>53</sup>

Cameron had also committed a tactical blunder. He announced early that the machine would support Beaver, giving the Independents a target. Quay tried to counter by endorsing for Galusha Grow, but the damage had been done.<sup>54</sup> The Colonel took note. He would not make that same mistake.

Courtesy of William Alan Blair



*J. Donald Cameron*

J. Donald Cameron

His strategy focused on three elements: winning the State treasurer's election to prove his popular support; getting his own man, Beaver, elected governor in 1886 to solidify Republicans in the legislature; and having himself chosen U.S. Senator in 1887. Tactics were pure Quay: work one-on-one; keep quiet; maneuver behind the scenes.

In 1885, only one State office was up for election. But to Quay, it was the all-important one of treasurer. It was an elected post. Quay, still suffering the taint of the treasury scandal of 1880, would try to demonstrate statewide support by risking an open election. If he lost, he faced a severe setback that threatened his state political career; if he won, he would secure an essential office and demonstrate to Republicans that he had sufficient popular support to help others win election in 1886, when a governorship and other state offices would be involved. The victories in 1886 would pull together the Republican party. And by coalescing that state power base, the Colonel would sweep to victory in 1887 to the U.S. Senate.

Quay started in 1885 by making the rounds of key newspaper editors and Republican Independents. The Colonel personally visited a number of the Independents who had worked against the machine in 1882. "... After a full conference with them, in nearly every instance he either obtained their assent to his candidacy or so mollified them as to prevent anything like a spontaneous eruption against him."<sup>55</sup> Even the *Patriot*, Harrisburg's Democratic newspaper, mounted little organized opposition. By the time the convention met in July, the nomination had been sealed.<sup>56</sup> Quay was chosen without serious Republican opposition, which amazed even newspaper editor Alexander K. McClure, who wondered what happened to the Independent movement that had so bitterly fought Quay just three years before.<sup>57</sup>

*The New York Times* noted the success and attributed it to another factor. "... Quay had managed during his political life to do a favor for some strong political worker in each district in the State. . . ."<sup>58</sup> The combination of patronage and money, along with Quay's personal tactics, carried the day. In November, Quay carried the office by 37,000 votes, leading the *Patriot* to contend that the "Republican Party is controlled by monopolies."<sup>59</sup> The writer was at best partially accurate: the party was about to be controlled by Matthew Stanley Quay.

Next, came the election of Beaver as governor. And Quay's usually friendly correspondence became more dictatorial. By the spring of 1886, he told Beaver which public appearances would be valuable and ordered the candidate to talk tariff.<sup>60</sup> Beyond such appearances to deliver prepared speeches, he wanted the candidate to keep his mouth shut. Early in the campaign, Quay demonstrated the value he placed on silence and on Beaver's election in general.

Your policy is to stand aside and allow the procession to pass until this convention is safely in hand and then only to interfere in case a disaster is imminent.

I may seem a little officious in my proffers of advice, but when I tell you that I am gravely alarmed about results next year and that I am personally interested as much, if not more, than yourself I am certain you will understand my anxiety. The next campaign will not be a walk around the roses not by a \_\_\_\_\_ sight.<sup>61</sup>

At the July convention, Beaver prevailed with little opposition. In November, he was elected governor by a 50,000-vote margin. On the heels of that election, papers began openly speculating about Quay as the next U.S. Senator, mentioning it as a foregone conclusion as early as November 10, 1886.<sup>62</sup> With Beaver's election, the Republicans returned to power. In January, the Republican-dominated-Legislature paid back the man who engineered the success, nominating Quay as U.S. Senator by an overwhelming majority. Newspapers gave the Colonel his due, but periodicals such as the *Nation* could not resist a few digs.<sup>63</sup>

McClure had watched the completion of a plan Quay set out in the editor's Philadelphia *Times* office in 1885. "He said he was fully convinced that he must make a battle for the State treasurer, or surrender the party sceptre, and he added that he preferred to fall fighting to being relegated to a secondary position in party control."<sup>64</sup> A short biography of Quay in the national press seemed almost prophetic of what would come next: "He is a man whose influence on national party politics may become marked, as he has an aptitude for management joined with much experience of its practical methods."<sup>65</sup>

Quay's management skills were soon tapped by the national party, which made him chairman for the 1888 campaign. The Colonel saw New York as the key state. Ruled by Republican boss Tom Platt but faced by a strong Democratic machine in New York City, the Empire State controlled a crucial block of electoral votes. Pennsylvania, which represented another large bloc, could be counted on. But New York previously had slipped away to Democrats. Determined not to let history repeat itself, Quay set up headquarters for the national campaign in New York City. He would have, he proclaimed to the press, a fair election. To stop false registrations, he established a fund to pay for information leading to a conviction on voting fraud. Under the guise of preparing a city directory—the use of indirection—Quay compiled lists of residents that he then said he would use to catch voters imported from other states.<sup>66</sup>

He continued to manage national details, counseling Harrison on his speeches, settling rifts within the Republican national committee, using his son as personal courier for sensitive material, and even giving the candidate almost fatherly advice: "Don't allow clubs and delegations to wear you out physically."<sup>67</sup>

Most historians credit Quay with Harrison's success. Unfortunately, the new president did not share the opinion. He believed "providence" had tipped the scales in his favor. Quay was startled by such an assessment, which also signaled that Harrison felt no need to repay the boss's election efforts. Quay later

remarked that Harrison "would never know how close a number of men were compelled to approach the penitentiary to make him President."<sup>68</sup> The rift widened between Quay and Harrison; other Republican party leaders became similarly disenchanted with a president who did not play the game of the practical politician. But running the campaign earned the Colonel from Pennsylvania a national reputation, proving he could elect a president.<sup>69</sup>

The remainder of Quay's political life was tempestuous. By 1890, he would become a target of the press. Ahead was the second scandal over state funds. He would be unseated by a vote in the U.S. Senate and would have to win it back in a subsequent election. In 1897, Wanamaker bid for the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate. When he and Quay had a falling out—and Penrose was elected—the stage was set for a bitter feud.<sup>70</sup> Wanamaker in 1898 would travel the state making 140 speeches denouncing "Quayism" and "Bossism."

Remarkably, Quay held firm against an uprising from within his party. And Quay remained popular with fellow senators and even with the lesser functionaries whom he manipulated. He harbored no bitterness and bore no grudges. At times, he displayed anger. But, as he showed in his on-again/off-again clash with the municipal bosses, he let the political situation of the moment, rather than personal feelings, dictate his actions.

Pennypacker, a distant cousin who became governor of Pennsylvania in 1902, marveled at how Quay could size up an individual and motivate him toward the boss's goals. He also illustrated how Quay could think ahead of the consequences of an act. During the governor's race in 1902, opponent John P. Elkin had offered money to someone who then went to the Quay-Pennypacker camp. When Pennypacker asked Quay if he should return the money, the boss replied: "No, if you return that money Elkin will use it somewhere else against me. You deposit it in your name in a trust company and get three per cent interest. After the campaign is over Elkin is sure to be dead broke. Then you give him that money. He will be glad and you will help him and me too."<sup>71</sup>

Quay had come far from his Beaver County roots. He learned to use the tools of a boss dispassionately and boldly. He could adapt, accepting even candidates he knew could not be elected. And he could pull strings while evoking respect in friends and foes alike. The last achievement reflected Quay's analytical temperament. He subordinated personal animosity and recognized the advantage of not making mortal enemies.<sup>72</sup>

As the founding father of Pennsylvania's Republican machine, Simon Cameron deserves much credit. But Quay played a pivotal role in the organization's longevity during uncertain times in the 1880s. Party leadership had to change to meet the dynamics of its own members. Simon Cameron appeared cognizant of this fact, and had begun to line up a successor when his own son proved lacking.

How much Quay acted on his own, or if he relied at all on the Camerons, is difficult to judge. He certainly did not divorce himself completely from them or

their machine. But while relying on the existing money and patronage base of the Camerons, the Colonel employed his own strategy. Even by 1886, a newspaper observed: "That he [Quay] is setting himself up independently of Simon Cameron, and that the latter is quietly but positively against him, is also distinctly seen."<sup>73</sup> Yet as late as 1888, correspondence between Quay and Beaver indicated the Colonel still respected some of the political wishes of the elder Cameron.<sup>74</sup>

The machine may have survived without Quay: political vacuums have a habit of being filled. But he served a valuable role during a pivotal time, earning respect even from those who criticized him. When he died in the spring of 1904, still a U.S. Senator, he received some negative press, but one Philadelphia journalist who had attacked the Colonel also recognized the passing of political talent: "... friend and foe bowed regretfully over the grave of Pennsylvania's ablest and most chivalrous political gladiator."<sup>75</sup>

## Notes

1. Frank Willing Leach, who became personal secretary to Matthew Stanley Quay, said, "It was the Chicago episode which largely superinduced the two years' revolt which ensued." See "Twenty Years with Matthew Stanley Quay," *Philadelphia North American*, July 3, 1904. Also, President Hayes thought the defeat of Grant in 1880 was "... due to the managers of the canvass, and their methods." He had little respect for Don Cameron, calling him "in all respects a failure as a politician." See T. Harry Williams, ed., *Hayes: The Diary of a President, 1875-1881* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1964), p. 278.
2. Leach, "Twenty Years," July 3, 1904. He also wrote: "That straw not only showed which way the wind was blowing, but it also broke the camel's back." Also, see *New York Times*, July 9, 1885, which assesses Magee "as a chosen lieutenant. . . . While Quay was allowed to work for his party he was not permitted to eat of its loaves and fishes."
3. Leach, "Twenty Years," July 3, 1904.
4. One historian said of the years after 1882, "Not for years was the machine restored to its former strength, this time under the more supple leadership of Matthew Quay." See Robert Harrison, "Blaine and the Camerons," *Pennsylvania History*, 49 (1982): 170.
5. James Kehl traces the development of this letter writing style under Curtin in *Boss Rule in the Gilded Age: Matt Quay of Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), pp. 11, 20-21. Also see Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The J. C. Winston Co., 1905), pp. 458-59.
6. Two works that illustrate how Cameron consolidated power after the Civil War are Frank B. Evans, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1872-1877: A Study in Political Leadership* (Harrisburg, 1966), especially Chapter XII; and John D. Stewart II, "The Deal for Philadelphia: Simon Cameron and the Genesis of a Political Machine, 1867-1872," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society*, 77 (1973): 44. Also useful is Kehl, *Boss Rule*, pp. 22-23.
7. Evans, *Pennsylvania Politics*, p. 326.
8. Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania* (New York, 1973), p. 321. Another historian calls the machine "the most powerful dynasty in the history of American politics." See Wayland F. Dunaway, *A History of Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey, 1963), pp. 438-39.
9. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, I, p. 209. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent references are from volume II.
10. Charles Richard Williams, ed., *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes* (Colum-

bus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1922-1926), 3: 136.

11. William Henry Smith, an Associated Press writer, tells about the heavy-handed younger Cameron, trying to use the letter-signing technique of his father. Don went to President Hayes with a statement signed by the Pennsylvania delegation favoring Simon for Minister to England. Don waved the paper and said, "This is what Pennsylvania wants." Next day, much of the delegation repudiated the letter, saying they signed under constraint. *Ibid.*, 514-15. Simon also knew the shortcomings of his son. He once replied to the statement that Don had fine advantages: "Yes, he has had more than his father, but there is one supreme advantage that he has never enjoyed—the stimulus of poverty and hardship." *Ibid.*, v. 4: 591.

12. Isaac F. Marcossan, "The Fall of the House of Quay," *World's Work*, 11 (1906): 7119.

13. Quoted in *Ibid.*

14. Marcossan traces the history of debauchery in the Pennsylvania treasury, attributing the start to William H. Kemble in the 1860s. See *Ibid.*: 7120. Kehl shows how Quay took advantage of the absence of laws mandating interest on state investments; *Boss Rule*, p. 67.

15. John Wanamaker, *The Speeches of Hon. John Wanamaker on Quayism and Boss Domination in Pennsylvania Politics* (Philadelphia: Business Men's Republican League of the State of Pennsylvania, 1898), p. 19. Also, see "King George; King Matthew," *Nation*, 66 (March 24, 1898): 219.

16. Quoted in Walter Davenport, *Power and Glory: The Life of Boies Penrose*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), p. 70.

17. Marcossan, "House of Quay," p. 7120.

18. Quay to Beaver, September 22, [1887], Box 4, folder 21, James Addams Beaver Collection, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University. Quay also soon began to educate the governor on how the treasury worked. He wrote Beaver on November 24, 1887: "Baily and his securities should be relieved of the interest upon the claim of the State and at the time of the adjustment I promised to speak to the proper author-

ities upon the subject. I wish you would speak to the Attorney General ... and have the proper credit given and the sale cleared. The practice is common." Beaver Collection, Box 4, folder 21.

19. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, pp. 503-4.

20. Letter, along with one from State Treasurer B. J. Haywood setting up the arrangement with Hopkins, quoted in Marcossan, "House of Quay," 7120. See also Kehl, *Boss Rule*, p. 215.

21. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, pp. 498-99.

22. Paul Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics Today and Yesterday* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1980), p. 42; Davenport, *Power and Glory*, p. 70.

23. T. L. Eyre to Quay, January 6, 1892, MSQ Papers, University of Pittsburgh Library, quoted in Kehl, *Boss Rule*, p. 181.

24. To be fair, both Democrats and Republicans used the spoils system. Although Republicans held most of the power in this era, the tradition started with Andrew Jackson. Republicans merely refined the practice.

25. An excellent analysis of postal appointments appears in "The Facts as to the Post Offices," *The Nation*, 45 (July 28, 1887): 232-33.

The article means to persuade that the Democratic administration did not make excessive use of patronage, but also illustrates how such jobs were part of a political machine.

26. Harrison, "Blaine and the Camerons," p. 160; Stewart, "Deal for Philadelphia," p. 47.

27. Wanamaker, pp. 231-32.

28. Quay had a somewhat unique position that strengthened his patronage influence. First, he was from a large state entitled to a commanding patronage share. Second, as head of the Republican machine he managed not only those jobs that would fall to him, but also the political plums of his Pennsylvania colleague.

29. G. E. Vickers, *Fall of Bossism*, (Philadelphia: n.p., 1883), pp. 63, 17.

30. Stephen White to Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in David J. Rothman, *Politics and Power: The United States Senate, 1869-1901* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 180.

31. William Alexis Stone, *The Tale of a Plain Man* (Pittsburgh: James Macmillan Printing Company, 1917), p. 178. Stone also said Quay "was always embarrassed by patronage and often said to me that he wished all of the offices were under the civil service law. There were so many friends to whom he was under obligations that it was always a serious problem with him which one to recommend." p. 176.
32. Russell Harrison to Benjamin Harrison, June 16, 1889, Harrison papers, Library of Congress, series 1, microfilm reel 20.
33. Vickers, *Fall of Bossism*, p. 12.
34. Among the useful descriptions of Quay are Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics*, pp. 41-44; and Thomas Collier Platt, *The Autobiography of Thomas Collier Platt*, compiled and ed. by Louis J. Lang (New York: B. W. Dodge and Company, 1910), pp. 211-12.
35. Harrisburg *Patriot*, January 6, 1887.
36. Leach, "Twenty Years," July 3, 1904.
37. Beers and Kehl develop similar theses. Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics*, p. 42, indicates Quay presided over a network of local and regional oligarchies. The "system was autocratic, but not totalitarian." He also described the rule of Quay and Penrose as "the two did answer to their associates, but more as managers or board chairmen than czars."
38. Quay to McKinley, May 15, 1895, McKinley Papers, Library of Congress, Series 1, Reel 1.
39. Kehl, *Boss Rule*, p. 42.
40. Mackey to Quay, June 4, 1870, Quay Papers, quoted in *Ibid.*, 36.
41. John W. Oliver, "Matthew Stanley Quay," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 17 (1934): 5-6; Kehl, *Boss Rule*, p. 184.
42. Kehl, *Boss Rule*, p. 21; Penn State President George Atherton was among the 200 people Quay touched for a \$25 campaign contribution in 1895: "Our platform limits our resources solely to the voluntary contribution of such generous Republicans as may have the disposition and ability to aid us. We need additional assistance at this time to consummate the plans we have marked out. The sum of \$5,000 will enable us to do this. Will you be one of the 200 to contribute \$25 to this fund? If so, kindly remit the undersigned by return mail, as our work comes to a close within a week." Quay to Atherton, October 25, 1895, George W. Atherton Papers, Box 6, folder E, Pennsylvania State University Archives, Pattee Library.
43. Oliver, "Matthew Stanley Quay," p. 10.
44. Davenport, p. 66.
45. "Senator Quay as Reformer," *Harper's Weekly*, 41 (1897): 910; Kehl, *Boss Rule*, pp. 192-93.
46. Quoted in Harrison, "Blaine and the Camerons," p. 165.
47. Stone, for example, said he "got very little assistance out of Quay, for he was not a dictator. He never asked me to make but one appointment." Stone, *Tales of a Plain Man*, p. 177. Many letters from Quay to Beaver suggested appointments but qualified the order, leaving final judgment up to the governor.
48. *The Nation*, March 10, 1898, p. 176; Kehl, *Boss Rule*, p. 29.
49. Harrison, "Blaine and the Camerons," p. 163. For maneuvering over an election date, see Quay to Beaver, January 12 and December 4, 1890, Beaver Collection, Box 8, folder 36, and Box 9, folder 23. For a sample of a tally sheet predicting voting results, see Box 6, Folder F of Atherton Papers, PSU Archives.
50. Quay to Beaver, April 18, 1888, Beaver Collection, Box 5, folder 18.
51. Letter to R. A. Dimmick, forwarded from Quay to Benjamin Harrison, November 24, 1888, Harrison Papers, Series 2, reel 59.
52. Platt, *Autobiography*, p. 211.
53. Unpublished draft of typewritten manuscript for *Keystone Weekly Gazette*, November 3, 1889, Box 6, Folder F., George W. Atherton Papers; McClure, *Old Time Notes*, p. 535.
54. Kehl, *Boss Rule*, p. 53.
55. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, pp. 561-2.
56. On July 8, 1885 the *Patriot* reported: "The Republican convention when it meets today will have little to occupy its time. The Quay caucus last night performed all the labor that usually devolves on conventions and thereby

made the meeting assume the character of a picnic."

57. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, pp. 561-2.

58. *The New York Times*, July 9, 1885.

59. *Patriot*, November 5, 1885.

60. He was particularly strong about forming the planks during the spring. Quay to Beaver, May 2 and June 19, 1886, Beaver Collection, Box 1, folder 46.

61. Quay to Beaver, December 24, 1885, Beaver Papers, Box 1, folder 46. Word omitted by Quay.

62. "There is no mystery now about Colonel Quay's movements, inasmuch as he no longer seeks to conceal his purpose, but openly declares that he is a candidate for United States Senator." *Patriot*, November 10, 1886.

63. "That he has any fitness for the office of Senator nobody seriously claims. . . . He is a boss pure and simple, with those elements of force which are possessed by all successful bosses." *The Nation*, 44 (January 13, 1887): 24.

64. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, p. 565.

65. "The New Senators," *Harper's Weekly*, 31 (1887): 63.

66. Kehl, *Boss Rule*, pp. 96-7, 103.

67. Quay to Harrison, July 30, 1888, Benjamin Harrison Papers, Series 1, reel 10.

68. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, p. 572; Klein and Hoogenboom, *History of Pennsylvania*, p. 327.

69. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, p. 570; also see Platt's assessment. The New York boss, of course, gave himself a share of the credit while acknowledging Quay's importance. Platt called Harrison, "The White House Iceberg." See *Autobiography*, pp. 215-18.

70. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, pp. 596-7.

71. Samuel W. Pennypacker, *The Autobiography of a Pennsylvanian* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1918), p. 267.

72. Leach himself was such a convert. In 1882, the man who would become the Colonel's secretary helped sidetrack an attempt by Quay to bring unity to the party. After 1882, Leach found himself out of work and without a penny to his name. Quay must have seen something he liked; he offered the man who had scuttled the peace effort a patronage job worth \$2,500 per year. "And thus was born the deep attachment which I felt for Colonel Quay. . . ." See Leach, "Twenty Years," July 3, 1904.

73. *New York Times*, June 4, 1886.

74. He told Beaver that he would usually have aided in a particular appointment "were it not that I have said to Gen. Cameron I would not. . . ." Quay to Beaver, May 5, 1888, Beaver Collection, Box 5, folder 18.

75. McClure, *Old Time Notes*, p. 619.