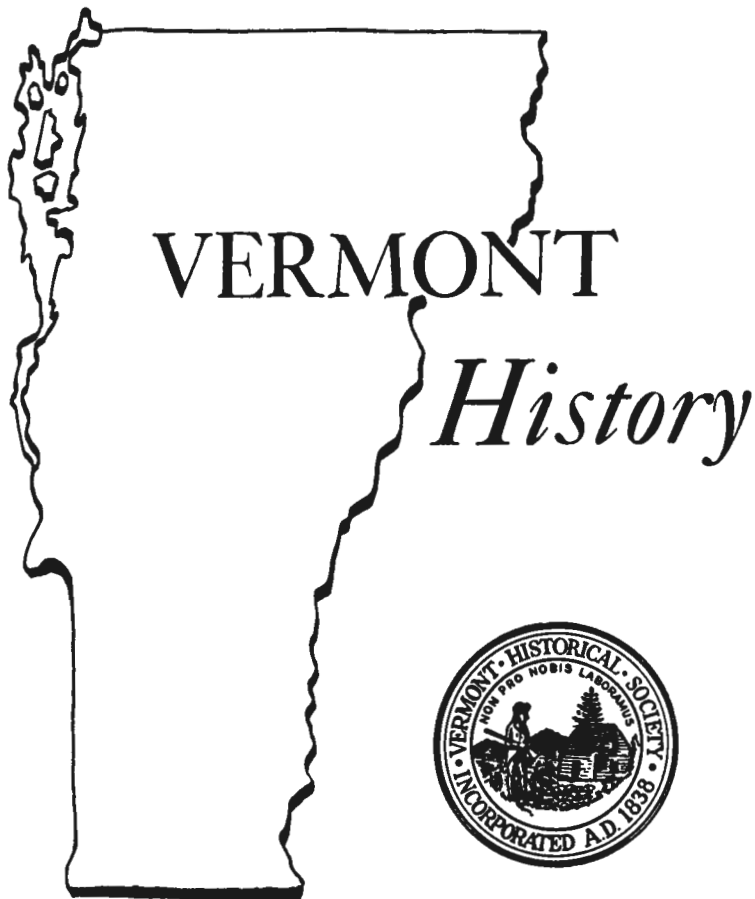


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This article is the first to draw upon the newly opened Aiken Papers at the University of Vermont. . . .

## Carrying Water on Both Shoulders: George D. Aiken's 1936 Gubernatorial Campaign in Vermont

By SAMUEL B. HAND AND D. GREGORY SANFORD

*Shortly after retiring from the U.S. Senate, where he represented Vermont for thirty-four years, George D. Aiken donated his files to the University of Vermont's Guy W. Bailey Library. Consisting of eighty-seven four drawer file cabinets mostly relating to his Senate career, they also include materials on his gubernatorial experiences. The following account of Aiken's 1936 gubernatorial campaign is recreated from those papers. All correspondence cited is from Crate 82, Box 2, followed by the appropriate folder number.*

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IMPRESSIONS of 1936 vary. To many, 1936 represents one year of that larger, haunting entity, the Great Depression. To the student of foreign affairs, it was the year when Mussolini tried to revive Italy's pale ghost of empire at the expense of Ethiopia, and European powers tuned up their war machines in tortured Spain. The aviation buff recognizes it as the year the dirigible *Hindenburg* opened new chapters in trans-Atlantic travel. To criminologists and movie buffs, it was the year that J. Edgar Hoover got his man, "Public Rat Number One," Alvin Karpis. To the sports fan, it was the year that Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio led the Yankees to victory in a cross-town World Series with the New York Giants. But mention 1936 to a vintage Republican and he is likely to grimace, for 1936 was the year

that Alf Landon, the Kansas Sunflower, wilted in the New Deal sun.

The Republicans had lost the 1932 Presidential election and to many, the subsequent programs of President Franklin D. Roosevelt appeared tainted with socialism. To continue the New Deal, they feared, would doom the "American way of life." To meet this threat, in 1936 the Republicans nominated an old Bull Mooser, Governor Alfred M. Landon of Kansas. Colonel Frank Knox, Chicago publisher and former Rough Rider, was chosen as his running mate. The Republican platform proclaimed "America is in peril," and prescribed a return to the good old days. The sunflower, Landon's symbol, signified the rural base of the party, while the Republicans' campaign song, "Oh Susanna," was indicative of their predilection for that misty-eyed past.

During the campaign Franklin Roosevelt, who had been renominated by acclamation, ignored Landon and directed his attack against Republican conservatism. By fall, it was so obvious that this strategy had succeeded that Roosevelt's campaign manager, James A. Farley, could confidently predict that the Democrat would carry every state but Maine and Vermont.

Farley's reputation as a political pundit was greatly enhanced when his prediction proved true and Roosevelt was returned to office by the widest electoral margin since 1820. The Democrats also swept the gubernatorial and Congressional elections. A jubilant Farley boasted that, with a little more work, Maine also would have fallen into the Democratic column. He made no such boast about Vermont.

Vermont, one of only three states to elect a Republican governor in 1936, was a study in marked contrasts on election night. For Burlington Democrats it was a night of celebration — one joyful crowd in City Hall Park burned a Landon sign while loudspeakers blared popular music. In Randolph, a distraught Republican killed himself after listening to the election returns. The Burlington *Free Press*, while proud that "Vermont again stands firm," was nonetheless distressed to note that the rest of the nation "follows strange gods." It was suggested that the federal government "run excursions from the rest of the country into Vermont to show people what a Republican looks like."<sup>1</sup>

Vermont's preeminent Republican was its newly elected governor, a 44-year-old Putney man named George David Aiken. Born in Dummerston, Vermont, in 1892, Aiken had gained regional prominence through a multi-faceted career as a horticulturist, author, lecturer, state legislator, and Lieutenant Governor. Building his campaign around his numerous social and business acquaintances throughout the state, Aiken garnered

1. Burlington *Free Press*, November 4, 1936 and November 7, 1936.

61% of the vote against Democrat Alfred Heininger and ran ahead of Landon and the national ticket.<sup>2</sup>

It would be easy to dismiss Aiken's success as merely the reflection of a near Pavlovian response by Vermonters to Republican office-seekers, but the Aiken papers show this to be an extremely shallow supposition. Aiken not only had to beat a popular Democrat in a year of general Democratic ascendancy, but also had to manage a difficult Republican primary campaign. Although Aiken could lay claim to the governorship through his rise from Representative (1931-33) to Speaker of the House (1933-34) and to Lieutenant Governor (1934-36), he was not without rivals within the Republican party. Aiken first had to contend with the incumbent governor, Charles M. Smith of Rutland, who, in light of the Vermont governorship's nascent two-term tradition, appeared an obvious choice for the 1936 nomination.<sup>3</sup> Other challengers included Speaker of the House Ernest Moore of Ludlow, newspaper publisher and American Legion leader Horatio Nelson Jackson of Burlington, and Colonel Leonard "Red" Wing of Rutland. The behind-the-scenes maneuvering between these men and various elements of the Vermont Republican party emerges as one reads through Aiken's correspondence of 1936.

That Aiken would eventually be a candidate for governor became apparent as early as 1935. However, the question remained as to whether he would risk a confrontation with Governor Smith in 1936 or whether he would wait until 1938. The recent spate of two-term governors supported sentiment that Smith should be allowed a second term, and, in fact, all other Republican hopefuls did not declare their candidacies until it was obvious Smith would not seek reelection.

Smith, a Rutland City Republican, had served in both Vermont Houses and had been Lieutenant Governor under Stanley Wilson, 1933-35. In 1935 he succeeded Wilson, but his administration had been a troubled one and there was some concern as to his effectiveness in a general election campaign against a revitalized Democratic party. In addition to his turbulent first administration, Smith was further handicapped by his age, 78.<sup>4</sup>

With Smith's candidacy in doubt, Aiken sent out feelers in regard to his own candidacy. He had received letters of support in late 1935 and several

2. Alf Landon became friends with Aiken, understandably in light of their common backgrounds. Landon was Aiken's preference for the Republican nomination in 1940. See for example, Aiken to Ralph Flanders, June 13, 1940, 82-2-40.

3. John Weeks, Governor 1928-31, was the first governor to serve more than two years since 1841, and more than one term since the biennial term was established in 1870. Stanley Wilson, Governor 1931-35, followed Weeks' precedent. By 1936 these two instances had established claims to a two-term "tradition."

4. Age in itself was not a handicap; Weeks had been 74 at the time of his reelection. Governor Smith, however, was not a vigorous seventy-eight. He died August 12, 1937.



people urged him to seek re-election as Lieutenant Governor.<sup>5</sup> But Aiken had already begun writing to various friends throughout the state, asking them to sound out people in their respective areas for a possible Aiken for Governor campaign.

Charles J. Allen replied to Aiken on January 30, 1936 that Smith's men had been in touch with him to discuss Smith's administration and how people viewed it. Allen had given an "honest" answer: Smith's administration had been unpopular in the Sherburne area. Nonetheless, Allen confided to Aiken that "I wish this was his second term, many will feel he ought to have a second term." No other candidate, Allen opined, "has a chance with you."<sup>6</sup> Noting that several prominent area men were waiting to see what Smith's intentions were before declaring their support for any other candidate, Allen urged Aiken to delay declaring his own candidacy.

John Keeler of Orleans received a similar request, and after "doing a little missionary work" reported that things looked "encouraging." Again, several local leaders were awaiting word from Smith but, "My honest opinion is that you have a better chance in Orleans County than Governor Smith."<sup>7</sup>

Allen had suggested that Aiken, in light of his relative youth, seek the support of the Vermont Young Republicans, but the Lieutenant Governor needed no such prompting and had already been in touch with Sterry R. Waterman, president of the Young Republicans and State's Attorney for Caledonia County. Smith had been angling for the backing of the Young Republicans through his use of patronage. However, it was not with the Governor but with Deane C. Davis, the young Superior Court judge from Barre, that Aiken had to vie for the Young Republican allegiance. Davis had resigned from his judgeship on January 23, 1936, a move that some interpreted as a preliminary step toward the governorship. Waterman, already leaning toward Aiken, wrote to the Lieutenant Governor that if Davis decided to run for Governor, "which is so doubtful as to be practically no possibility at all, . . . the natural reaction" of the Young Republicans would be "to support the young man candidate," but, "Outside of that the young people of the state would flock to your standard."<sup>8</sup>

Aiken revealed his intentions in various other ways. In an exchange between Barre attorney Elwin L. Scott, Dr. Sandor Baruch, and the

5. John Gilfeather, Rutland Municipal Court clerk, wrote Aiken on August 30, 1935, 82-2-2, urging him to run for reelection, "keep in the limelight and succeed him [Smith]."

6. Charles J. Allen to Aiken, January 30, 1936, 82-2-4.

7. John Keeler to Aiken, January 31, 1936, 82-2-4.

8. Sterry Waterman to Aiken, February 3, 1936, 82-2-4. Davis ended up running for representative from Barre. He lost to Mayor John Gordon. The young hopeful of 1936 was elected governor in 1968 and was the oldest governor in the nation when he retired in 1973.

Lieutenant Governor, Aiken did some skillful politicking. Scott initiated the exchange, writing Aiken on January 22, 1936, in support of Dr. Baruch, who had “every reason to believe that [William] Bartlett, who opposed you for Lieutenant Governor two years ago, through [W. Arthur] Simpson and others” was trying to have Baruch removed from the state Examining Board of Chiropractors and replaced by Bartlett’s wife.<sup>9</sup> Aiken felt that his “interceding with the Governor . . . would very likely have the opposite effect from what you desire,” as there was “quite a lot” of talk around that he might be a candidate for governor and “this might not appeal to Governor Smith.” Then Aiken baited his hook, remarking that if he did become a candidate and was elected, he would “hardly turn down my best supporters for favor of my opponents so long as they are well qualified.”<sup>10</sup> Both Baruch and Scott became active Aiken campaigners, with Baruch, who retained his position on the board, being especially supportive of Aiken’s subsequent political ambitions.

Reliance on a network of acquaintances for a political campaign has several inherent drawbacks. To hold the network together through promises of office would lead to internal dissension, rivalry, and jealousy. Aiken was wisely taciturn in his dealings with favor-seeking supporters. One particularly hazardous situation arose when it was suggested former Governor Stanley Wilson would offer his support if Aiken reciprocated the favor in 1938 when Wilson anticipated challenging the incumbent Senator, Ernest Gibson, in the Republican senatorial primary. Aiken, who enjoyed close political and personal ties with Ernest Gibson, Jr., rose to the heights of impassioned rhetoric, proclaiming “. . . I have no trades with anybody. Not even my best friends have been or will be promised that.”<sup>11</sup> In another exchange, Aiken wrote that “It is pretty generally understood down this end of the state that I promise no rewards for supporting me other than to give the best I have to the office, and I do not expect to consider appointments until after I am elected.”<sup>12</sup>

Buoyed by the reports of his friends and realizing that Governor Smith would have to scramble to catch him, Aiken declared early. He sent his announcement to the *Brattleboro Reformer* on February 1st. “Replying to the many folks who have asked if I intend to be a candidate for the Republican nomination for Governor in the September primaries, I want to say that I shall be.”<sup>13</sup> His declaration, the *Burlington Free Press* noted, was “not likely to cause any great surprise.” While not endorsing Aiken

9. Elwin L. Scott to Aiken, January 22, 1936, 82-2-4.

10. Aiken to Elwin Scott, January 27, 1936, 82-2-4.

11. Aiken to Charles Allen, February 6, 1936, 82-2-4.

12. Aiken to C. O. Granai, March 13, 1936, 82-2-5.

13. Aiken to *Brattleboro Reformer*, February 1, 1936, 82-2-4.

(the *Free Press* would retain an official stance of neutrality throughout the primary), the editors observed that "Aiken has shown rather unusual strength as a vote-getter, both in the campaign for the speakership in 1933 and in beating out Bill Bartlett for lieutenant-governor in 1934," though they felt he would have a hard campaign if Smith decided to run. The *St. Albans Messenger* waggishly referred to Aiken's announcement as a "formal notice upon all victims," and chided Colonel H. Nelson Jackson, a rumored candidate, not to "procrastinate unreasonably if he intends to crash the party and stay until refreshments."<sup>14</sup>

But Jackson did not immediately declare nor did Moore, Davis, Wing, Smith, or other rumored contenders. Governor Smith's silence relegated many of the rivals to a political limbo unwilling to defy the incipient two-term tradition or to risk running against the incumbent. So ostensibly Aiken had a clear field and he promptly took advantage of it.

His announcement eschewed campaign promises because "I realize the distrust, often justified, which many people have for political platforms and promises." He did pledge "to discuss a number of matters having to do with the welfare of Vermont" later in the year.<sup>15</sup> His avoidance of promises had the advantage of not giving his rivals a concrete program to attack.

The first problem Aiken had to face in his official campaign was that of finance. Early supporter Charles Allen noted "some disadvantages . . . It will take money to reach the voter by Radio and rallies and most of your friends are poor."<sup>16</sup> When Dean H. Lake, former secretary to the Delegate to Congress from Hawaii and speechwriter for Senator Ernest Gibson, requested a position in the Aiken campaign, he was turned down because "financial circumstances prohibit at this time."<sup>17</sup> This became a frequent complaint throughout his campaign, but Aiken decided that "If there is [opposition] I shall have to depend on friends rather than money to elect me."<sup>18</sup> In fact, Aiken "wouldn't consider it any honor to be elected governor at an expense of five or ten or twenty thousand dollars."<sup>19</sup>

Although he was without a full campaign chest, he was not without resources. Through his nursery and his five years in state politics, Aiken had made numerous friends, many of whom now came forward to serve as volunteers. He wrote Senator Gibson on April 15th that the political

14. Burlington *Free Press*, February 5, 1936. The *St. Albans Messenger* comment is quoted in the *Free Press*.

15. Aiken to Brattleboro *Reformer*, February 1, 1936, 82-2-4.

16. Charles Allen to Aiken, January 30, 1936, 82-2-4.

17. Aiken to Dean Lake, April 23, 1936, 82-2-5.

18. Aiken to Ernest Gibson, April 15, 1936, 82-2-5.

19. Aiken to F. A. Chapin, February 8, 1936, 82-2-4.

situation was still nebulous, "with more or less apparent confusion in the camps of potential opponents." Burlington and Rutland had offered to organize clubs for him, "and as I have not money to spend myself and don't want to spend other folks'," it was his intention "to let local committees in each part of the state organize and conduct their own campaigns" in his behalf.<sup>20</sup>

Aiken had a unique vehicle for covering the state and incidentally meeting potential workers and voters — his illustrated wildflower shows. In addition to his political life, Aiken was a successful horticulturist and head of Aiken Nurseries. The nursery, one of the largest in New England, had a nation-wide mailing list and had dealings with twenty-seven foreign countries, including New Zealand and China. It was more than just a business to Aiken; he had written two books, *Pioneering with Wildflowers* (1933) and *Pioneering with Fruits and Berries* (1936), on the subject and was much sought after as a lecturer for garden clubs in the Vermont-New Hampshire-Massachusetts area. He accompanied his lectures with a slide show which he ran himself.

The flower shows were pretty much a one-man operation. Aiken usually drove his own car to the lectures and operated the "magic lantern" for the slide show. He also made all the arrangements. His flower show correspondence is filled with such admonitions to his hosts to "be sure the electricity is turned on." He assured people that "all the equipment I will need . . . will be a suitable stand for setting the lantern on," and that, "I can operate it [the lantern] myself and talk at the same time . . . so it won't be necessary to have an operator."<sup>21</sup>

It is no accident that Aiken subsequently filed his flower show communications under "political correspondence" for in 1936 his shows effectively furthered his candidacy. After April he limited his out-of-state appearances to concentrate on Vermont. He turned down one request from Stamford, Connecticut, because "this year I do not expect to be able to accept dates after the middle of April, as I will be too busy."<sup>22</sup>

Aiken also lowered his fees. Earlier in the year he had quoted twenty-five dollars as the cost for a show but this soon changed. The twenty-five dollar fee became "whatever you can afford to pay," "the charge [in Vermont] would be slight", or "expenses." If necessary, they

20. Aiken to Ernest Gibson, April 15, 1936, 82-2-5.

21. Aiken to G. M. Allbee, January 27, 1936, 82-2-4; Aiken to Sara B. Gage, January 31, 1936, 82-2-4; Aiken to Addie E. Parkhill, June 11, 1936, 82-2-6. Aiken not only drove himself, but served as his own mechanic. Mrs. R. S. Pitkin reminisced with Aiken in an April 1 letter about repairing the car's headlight with a nail file and hair pin. Aiken replied that if he was elected, "I can probably say that all I am or ever hope to be I owe to old Lizzie." 82-2-5.

22. Aiken to Mrs. Malcolm J. Edgerton, February 3, 1936, 82-2-4.



became free: "If you care to take care of my expenses . . . it will be appreciated; if not, I will come just the same," or "If you want to pay cost of gasoline, all right; if not, all right."<sup>23</sup>

Some of his flower show correspondence became openly political. Mrs. Raymond E. Pratt of Newfane wrote, "this is to be a public meeting and would give you opportunity to talk with many people around here, about all I can offer is the support of your garden friends and neighbors and Oh Yes, the Game Warden says he'd think it an honor to furnish transportation for our future governor." Aiken, not yet a declared candidate, wrote back, "I would not bother the Game Warden to transport me."<sup>24</sup> In an even more revealing letter, Earl Horsford of Charlotte suggested to Aiken that he give "one of your political talks" instead of the lecture on wildflowers "which some of the farmers here would probably not appreciate as well as they should."<sup>25</sup>

Aiken's nursery business proved a political asset in other ways as well. He had let Archibald C. Hurd, district secretary for the Young Men's Christian Association, give tours of the nursery to young people and Hurd returned this kindness by introducing him to potential backers; "I thought that perhaps you might invite Garfield [Miller] and his family to visit your place" since "they would be carried away with your wildflower beds, and it would give you an opportunity to become acquainted with one of the outstanding men in this section."<sup>26</sup>

Aiken Nurseries also sponsored a radio show on WNBX in Springfield, featuring the singing of Ernest Hurd accompanied by pianist Leo Hartwell. Aiken spoke "briefly and informally about plant growing, as well as ordinary [sic] topics of the day," while Hurd caught his breath "preparatory to singing again." Plant growing was mentioned but the ordinary "topics of the day" became increasingly political. "In spite of flood and drought, red spiders and Congress we increased our [nursery] business . . . last year."<sup>27</sup>

Speaking to the State Grange on April 1, Aiken commended the good work it had done in bringing people together during the hard times of the Depression. "Unable to splurge as we did between 1920 and 1930, we can find just as much enjoyment in trying to build up our own communities and the welfare of our neighbors as we did . . . going in debt head over heels for nobody's benefit." He was quick to point out his "nearly thirty years"

23. Aiken to Mrs. A. F. Landon, April 29, 1936, 82-2-5. Aiken to G. M. Allbee, January 27, 1936, 82-2-4.

24. Mrs. Raymond E. Pratt to Aiken, January 15, 1936, 82-2-4.

25. Earl Horsford to Aiken, February 15, 1936, 82-2-4.

26. Archibald C. Hurd to Aiken, May 23, 1936, 82-2-5.

27. Aiken text for WNBX radio broadcast, Springfield, June 29, 1936, 82-2-3.

association with the Grange and avowed that the "experience gained in those early Grange meeting debates has stood me in good stead during later years." Most of the remainder of the show was devoted to regional boosterism — an Aiken theme throughout the campaign. He pointed to Vermont's and New England's agricultural record which, "we are altogether to [sic] modest about" and argued the need for self-sufficiency and support of local business. "Why not keep what little money we have to spend as near home as we can? . . . When we contribute to our neighbors' prosperity we are contributing to our own."<sup>28</sup> Aiken would later note that he had the solid support of the Grange.

His four years in the House and two as Lieutenant Governor helped create support among the professional politicians of both parties, and the Young Republicans in particular. Sterry Waterman began to work for Aiken's election at an early date. Thomas K. Salmon of Clarendon Springs, who followed Waterman as head of the Young Republicans, acted as Republican publicity director in the 1936 race. Martin Judd, police chief of Hartford, Vermont, and member of the Windsor County Young Republican Club, waged an active campaign for Aiken in the White River Junction area.<sup>29</sup>

In turn, Aiken supported Young Republicans. He favored the election of Ernest Gibson, Jr. and Sterry Waterman as delegates to the Republican National Convention. "If the Republicans don't give the young folks a chance" Aiken asserted, "they might as well quit now as let [the Republican party] drag along any further."<sup>30</sup>

Aiken's popularity was not limited to the Republican party. Alfred Heininger, his close friend and Democratic opponent in the gubernatorial contest, congratulated Aiken on his candidacy. James E. Burke, Democratic mayor of Burlington, offered quiet support in Aiken's primary campaign. One Democrat wrote Aiken in February that he would split his ticket and vote for Aiken and Roosevelt, although, "having been brought up in an atmosphere of idolization of Woodrow Wilson, it seems strange to vote Republican." Aiken tried to ease the man's conscience by admitting "that the first president I ever voted for was Woodrow Wilson." He went on to expound on one of his favorite themes, "It has always seemed to me more desirable to get the right results than to quibble over who is going into the job. I think the younger members of both political parties are inclined to share this opinion with me."<sup>31</sup>

28. *Ibid.*, April 1, 1936, 82-2-3.

29. One of Aiken's strongest supporters was Young Republican Ernest Gibson, Jr. Aiken and Gibson were in almost daily contact and although there is no surviving written communication between them for 1936, Gibson's name appears prominently in Aiken's correspondence.

30. Aiken to Allen Ball, March 7, 1936, 82-2-5.

31. Aiken to Joseph B. Williams, February 12, 1936, 82-2-4.

While Aiken campaigned, other opponents maneuvered for a favorable starting position. Governor Smith remained silent, increasingly weighted by the unpopularity of his administration and his advanced age. He still had the incumbent's advantage of patronage, but patronage had its limits. Smith, Aiken observed, banked too strongly on the appointments he had made, since "it should be remembered that for every one of his appointees, who will support him, there are half a dozen disappointed ones, who will work their heads off to beat him."<sup>32</sup>

As Smith's position deteriorated, the other aspirants became emboldened. Colonel Jackson and Ernest Moore were particularly active, though they remained undeclared. William H. Dyer, mayor of Montpelier, warned Aiken that W. Arthur Simpson of the Old Age Pension Commission was helping to direct Jackson's forces and had been speaking out on financial issues in Jackson's behalf. Aiken replied that he had felt at times "one could consolidate some of our state bureaus and commissions and it is interesting to note that the Old Age Commission is taking on the Finance Commissioner's duties." He went on to report that he had "quite a decided lead" over undeclared candidates Smith and Jackson, although their "strategy is now to beguile [former Congressman] Elbert Brigham or [Leonard] Red Wing into the contest, knowing perfectly well that either of these men would cut into my vote quite decidedly and give Jackson a chance." Aiken felt that if he could keep Wing and Brigham out of the primary, then "Jackson, Smith, Moore, Simpson, all together or separately, cannot keep me from being nominated this fall."<sup>33</sup> He had calculated that "Colonel Wing representing Proctor and Col. Jackson the bankers as opponents would necessarily leave the labor and farm vote no where to go except to me. I am not worrying as yet."<sup>34</sup>

Judge Moore's potential candidacy had attracted Aiken's attention at an early date. In a January 31st letter to Waterman, Aiken mentioned that "Speaker Moore is playing some game so deep that the rest of us cannot fathom it." But he believed that "the Speaker would pretty nearly have to eliminate me as a candidate for Governor or Lieutenant-Governor to attain any ambitions of his own." Since Aiken had openly said that he would not run for Lieutenant Governor, "the best guess is that at a rather late date he may become a candidate for Lieutenant-Governor with Governor Smith."<sup>35</sup>

32. Aiken to Waterman, January 31, 1936, 82-2-4.

33. Aiken to William H. Dyer, April 17, 1936, 82-2-5.

34. Aiken to Elwin L. Scott, April 24, 1936, 82-2-5.

35. Aiken to Sterry Waterman, January 31, 1936, 82-2-4.



Aiken's main concern was with Colonel Wing. He recognized that Wing would cut heavily into his support and possibly force him into a tight, and increasingly expensive, primary race.

The other threat faced by Aiken was the possibility of a candidate from the "so-called National Life outfit" who might also split his support. Among the names mentioned were those of Elbert Brigham, Ward Carver, and Deane Davis, who had joined National Life after his resignation as Superior Court Judge. Aiken hoped that Davis would come out openly for him or serve as chairman of an Aiken club in Barre, since, "to do so . . . would prove very sickening to other potentialities."<sup>36</sup>

April passed with no formal declarations. The Burlington *Free Press* commented that "Formally announced candidates for the Republican nomination are conspicuous by their absence" and reported that Aiken was "quietly increasing an already wide acquaintance and gathering steady support."<sup>37</sup>

May, however, brought a burst of political activity as one by one the contenders announced if they would run. On May 5th, Colonel Jackson formally entered the campaign. Jackson was a colorful figure; publisher of the Burlington *Daily News*, founder of the Vermont chapter of the American Legion, and first man to drive a car cross-country (1903). He had been in turn a surgeon, prospector, mining engineer, and banker. He was the preferred candidate of businessmen, many of whom felt that Aiken lacked business experience or was too "radical." Jackson promised to run the state government on "today's business methods" and to "take the farmers out of the mud" by paving rural roads.<sup>38</sup> He rounded out his platform by vowing to keep Vermont's youth in the state and to open up recreation facilities to attract the tourist trade.

Six days after Jackson's declaration, John Reid, a Burlington independent, entered the Republican primary. Relatively unknown and no real threat, Reid attacked increased taxation and promised to reorganize the "top-heavy" state legislature by having county rather than town representation.

The remaining contenders were flushed out at the Republican state convention on May 12-13. The forces of Wing and Moore had fashioned an alliance, promising not to declare without consulting one another. This

36. *Ibid.*

37. Burlington *Free Press*, April 22, 1936.

38. Rutland Herald, May 5, 1936. Aiken, aware of this opposition, informed Elwin L. Scott on April 24, 1936, 82-2-5. that, "bankers and industrialists of the state might unite in backing Jackson in order to defeat the 'liberal Lieutenant-Governor'." For more on Jacksons see Ralph Nading Hill, *The Mad Doctor's Drive* (Brattleboro, 1964).



alliance collapsed on the 13th when Judge Moore declared his candidacy with Governor Smith's apparent consent. There was some fear that the Moore-Wing split, and a possible five-way primary battle, would strain party unity and aid the Democrats. On May 19th, Colonel Wing helped quell these fears by announcing that he would not seek the nomination.

This greatly pleased the Aiken forces. Aiken had estimated that Wing would have cost him 10,000 votes while Judge Moore could not "pull more than half the vote Colonel Wing would have."<sup>39</sup> Sterry Waterman agreed, writing on May 19th that "everything ought to be swell now."<sup>40</sup> In fact, Wing now began to support Aiken. He advised Mrs. Gertrude Daniels, Southeast District Chairman of the Women's Republican Club of Vermont, to have Aiken come to Grafton and "horse around among some of these Moore supporters."<sup>41</sup>

With Wing's support, Aiken's campaign was in fine shape and the rest of the field desperately sought to find an issue with which to initiate a victory drive. Judge Moore had the requisite legislative credentials and was Governor Smith's choice, but Aiken's claims to the gubernatorial succession were unshakable. Unable to gain any clear advantage by running on his experience, Moore tried to revive the Green Mountain Parkway issue.

Earlier in the year, Vermonters had contended over the question of whether to allow a highway to be constructed through the Green Mountains. The highway, modelled on the famous Skyline Drive in Virginia offered the advantages of creating large-scale employment and of attracting tourists. The state would have to put up three per cent of the cost of construction and the federal government would pay the rest. Opponents argued that the highway would scar the natural beauty of Vermont, allow further intrusion of federal control into the state, and cost Vermonters five hundred thousand dollars [three percent of costs]. The state seemed so closely divided on this issue that the Legislature, after first defeating the proposal, provided for a popular referendum and on March 3 the Parkway was voted down, 42,318 to 30,897.<sup>42</sup>

Aiken managed to avoid being drawn into the conflict. "I cannot get excited enough about the Parkway to let either side use my name in any propaganda. I am sure it would not do the harm its opponents claim it would, nor would it do as much good as its proponents claim." When,

39. Aiken to Harmon B. Soule, April 20, 1936, 82-2-5. Soule became the Democratic candidate for Lieutenant Governor.

40. Sterry Waterman to Aiken, May 19, 1936, 82-2-5.

41. Mrs. Gertrude Daniels to Aiken, June 3, 1936, 82-2-6.

42. For an in-depth study of the Green Mountain Parkway issue, see Frank M. Bryan and Kenneth Bruno, "Black-topping the Green Mountains: Socio-Economic and Political Correlates of Ecological Decision-Making," *Vermont History*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Autumn, 1973), 224-235.

during February, he was pressed to give his view on the grounds that the people should know how a candidate for governor stood on key issues, he replied he could not "consider an issue which is to be settled supposedly in the next three weeks as a next fall's campaign issue."<sup>43</sup>

Aiken proved correct; the Parkway did not become an issue in the primary. Thwarted on the Parkway controversy, Moore campaigned on an anti-New Deal platform while Aiken reiterated that "I have never opposed and never expect to oppose any measure calculated to relieve human distress, or to provide a more equitable opportunity for those equally deserving" simply on the grounds that "those measures are endorsed by an opposing party or its candidates."<sup>44</sup>

Moore failed in his attempts to find an issue to beat Aiken. Despite a surge of Moore-for-Governor clubs, Aiken could write to Mrs. Daniels on June 4th, "Don't believe him [Moore] when he says the contest is between him and Jackson. Moore will finish a poor third."<sup>45</sup>

Jackson posed a different problem. Both Aiken and Jackson expressed similar views on many of the issues — the need for paving dirt roads, the need to keep young Vermonters in the state, and the need to attract residents and tourists to Vermont. Jackson was popular and had the backing of business, but he labored under several disadvantages. He did not have the legislative experience of either Aiken or Moore; he had backed a Democratic candidate in 1932 and was therefore viewed with suspicion by die-hard Republicans. Furthermore, he was from the western side of the Green Mountains, marking him as ineligible in the eyes of Republican politicians who venerated the Mountain Rule. Since its rise to dominance in the 1850's, the Republican party had by unofficial rule alternated the governorship between candidates east of the Green Mountains and those west. This policy mitigated power struggles and fragmentation within the party. Governor Smith was from Rutland, and, if Jackson succeeded him, it would have meant two successive westerners in the Statehouse, something the easterners would not accept easily.<sup>46</sup>

With the issues drawn, the primary settled into what the Rutland *Herald* called "an apathetic walk contest."<sup>47</sup> The summer of 1936 was better

43. Aiken to Birney Hall, February 18, 1936, 82-2-4. Birney Hall was Secretary and Treasurer of the Friends of the Parkway.

44. Aiken, undated speech, [May] 1936, 82-2-3. Moore was a long time opponent of the New Deal. For insights into Moore's, Aiken's and Governor Smith's relationships with the New Deal, see Aiken's letter to John Winant, Chairman of the Social Security Board, Nov. 28, 1936, 82-2-8.

45. Aiken to Mrs. Gertrude Daniels, June 4, 1936, 82-2-6.

46. For a more detailed description of the Mountain Rule, see Lyman Jay Gould and Samuel B. Hand, "The Geography of Political Recruitment in Vermont: A View from the Mountains", in *Growth and Development of Government in Vermont*, ed. Reginald L. Cook, The Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences, Occasional Paper No. 5 (1970), 19-24.

47. Rutland *Herald*, September 1, 1936.

remembered for the snow which fell on June 30th than for the primary campaign. Aiken's early declaration and effective campaigning seemed to assure him the nomination. On September 9th he emerged victorious, beating Jackson 23,584 to 19,162. As Aiken predicted, Moore finished a "poor third" with 11,917 votes, while John Reid rounded out the field with 1,228.

Now Aiken had to face his old friend, Democratic state senator Alfred Heininger, in the gubernatorial contest. The campaign revolved around the sub-marginal land issue, the Old Age Pension, and state rights versus federal control. The Democrats urged adoption of a program that would allow the federal government to buy land classified as sub-marginal, restore it, and lease it back to the state under certain restrictions. The Republicans countered that too much land would be taken out of private hands, that such a program would depopulate the rural towns, erode the state's tax base, and concede too much federal control over state affairs.

Aiken took a page from Moore's book and attacked the New Deal, particularly the Re-Settlement Administration, which would oversee the sub-marginal land program. He spoke out in October against "that visible and invisible government in Washington, whose thoughts and actions are so alien to the free-thinking people of Vermont and of the nation; whose policy for the last four years has been one of debt and destruction."<sup>48</sup>

The Old Age Pension issue revolved around its authorship and whether it was adequate for the needs of Vermont's senior citizens. Heininger had chaired the Senate committee that reported the bill and he claimed credit for its enactment. Aiken countered that it had been supported by both parties, that in fact he had helped appoint Heininger to the chairmanship, and that Heininger's proposals for funding the act were inadequate. Breaking down Heininger's proposed budget for the act, Aiken calculated that it would mean only \$2.75 a week for those eligible. "Mr. Heininger apparently enjoys the expression 'carrying water on both shoulders' and applies it to me frequently. It is evident," Aiken observed, "that Mr. Heininger never worked in a Vermont sugar orchard or he would know that carrying water on both shoulders tends to keep the head level and to prevent one's going around in circles." He added that it was "certainly preferable to have water on both shoulders than to have it between and just a little above the shoulders and I for one could not put my heart into his proposal of singing 'Home Sweet Home' on \$2.75 a week." Aiken went on to say that "the federal government should bear a much larger proportion of the expense."<sup>49</sup>

48. Aiken, campaign speech, October 12, 1936, 82-2-3.

49. Aiken, undated campaign speech, 1936, 82-2-3.



Heininger tried to raise an issue over the surfacing of back roads and claimed that the Republicans were "afraid to offend the blacktop boys by indicating they will use more concrete in new construction. They are afraid to offend the cement roads enthusiasts by making a statement that they will continue the use of blacktop." Aiken, seizing upon Heininger's purported solution to construct roads with ten feet of concrete in the middle and five feet of blacktop on each side, remarked "I hope he doesn't offend either group with his proposal."<sup>50</sup>

The outcome of the election was never in doubt, a fact acknowledged by both candidates. Letters to Aiken after September 9th addressed him as governor. Aiken himself began to act as if he were already elected. An illustration of this change occurred on October 16 when he requested information from numerous states on their dealings with the Re-Settlement Administration for his use when governor.<sup>51</sup>

He replied to a request for a flower show talk by saying that "I am the Republican candidate for governor and if elected will have to postpone giving wildflower talks for a while. If I am not elected, which would be quite unusual, I will, of course, be glad to speak to your club."<sup>52</sup>

People began to petition Aiken for jobs, but he insisted they wait until after the election. An old friend who wanted to be Aiken's chauffeur was politely refused after the election. Aiken had discovered that "the Governor of Vermont either has to pay his own chauffeur or hitchhike or drive himself, whichever he prefers."<sup>53</sup>

On November 4, while Landon was being driven off the front page and into the footnotes of history texts, Aiken was swept into office, beating Heininger 83,602 to 53,218. He expected, Aiken wrote that day, to be in Wallingford next Wednesday, but that would have to "be about the last of the wildflower talks I can give for some time because I've got to stop running around and study state problems a little bit."<sup>54</sup> And on November 7 he acknowledged Heininger's congratulations. He appreciated "the good spirit" in which Heininger conducted his campaign and suspected he had "had a good time campaigning." "When you said in Burlington last week that if Vermont would go Democratic we would make the first page of every newspaper in the country I fully agreed with your statement. Neither of us thought we would make the first page by voting Republican."<sup>55</sup>

50. *Ibid.*

51. For example, see Aiken to Chairman, New York State Planning Board, October 16, 1936, 82-2-7.

52. Aiken to Mrs. Frank H. Butler, October 11, 1936, 82-2-7.

53. Aiken to Horace Holway, November 14, 1936, 82-2-8.

54. Aiken to Mrs. Eugene Smith, November 4, 1936, 82-2-7.

55. Aiken to Heininger, November 7, 1936, 82-2-8.