

ISAAH D. CLAWSON
A SALEM COUNTY POLITICIAN IN A TIME OF TRANSFORMATION

by Bruce A. Bendler, Ph.D., an Adjunct Professor in the History Department at the University of Delaware teaching courses in "Colonial America" and "Revolutionary Delaware" and an Adjunct Professor at Wesley College. He is author of "Colonial Delaware Records 1681-1713" (1992), "Colonial Delaware Assemblymen, 1682-1776" (1989) and "The Manlove Family: A Genealogical History" (1977).

Isaiah D. Clawson was born in Woodstown, New Jersey, on March 30, 1822, the son of Israel R. Clawson. Israel Clawson was a physician and a part-time politician who served in both houses of the New Jersey General Assembly in the 1820s and early 1830s. Israel himself got involved in politics at a time of transformation, as the Federalist party was disintegrating and as the American political system reconfigured itself based on support of or opposition to Andrew Jackson. Israel Clawson, having entered politics as a Jeffersonian Democrat, chose to affiliate with the opposition to Jackson, which in time became the Whig party.

Isaiah Clawson would follow in his father's footsteps in more ways than one. He became both a physician and a politician. Like his father, Isaiah Clawson became involved in politics at a time of political upheaval, at the end of the Age of Jackson, when the Second Party System disintegrated. The old Whig party irretrievably splintered over the slavery question. For a few brief years, the American (Know-Nothing) party rose up to oppose the tenuously-united Democrats, after which the Republican party emerged to challenge the Democracy. In New Jersey, a longstanding dispute over monopoly privileges accorded to the Camden and Amboy Railroad and the Delaware and Raritan Canal—the Joint Companies—added to the political friction. Indeed, Isaiah Clawson entered the political arena at a time of almost kaleidoscopic change.

Isaiah Clawson received an education that prepared him for careers in both medicine and public service. In 1833, he began his studies at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, after which he attended Newark College in Delaware, the forerunner of the University of Delaware. In 1840, he earned a bachelor's degree at Princeton and, in 1843, a doctorate in medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.¹ It was during his college years that young Isaiah made decisions about his career and his political affiliation. Typical of many students, he did not always pursue his studies with diligence, and he also may have sought to escape a strict religious upbringing. T. Cailhopper, a friend from Woodstown, wrote Clawson, then at Newark College, venting his distaste for a Bible class he attended. "I don't think much of it," even though he did not "mind going to meeting once in a while." Evidently, Cailhopper felt that he would find in Isaiah Clawson a sympathetic listener.²

Indeed, Richard F. Turner of Woodstown felt compelled to offer young Clawson some spiritual counsel. In September 1838, when Clawson was a student at Princeton, Turner implored the sixteen-year-old student not to ignore spiritual values. After discussion of a "sickly season" prevailing in his hometown, Turner expressed his chagrin at seeing "so many unprepared to meet God in judgment." Turner then urged Clawson to attend to spiritual matters, urging him to consider "the beauty there is in the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ."³

Clawson also faced more mundane concerns. On August 11, 1838, he wrote his father from Nassau Hall in Princeton asking, as most students do, for money. He had just

¹ Isaiah D. Clawson, *Memoranda of my Life* (Woodstown, New Jersey, n. p., 1877), 5-16.

² T. Cailhopper, Woodstown, to Isaiah D. Clawson (hereafter: IDC), Newark, Delaware, April 13, 1836, Clawson Papers, C0405, Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey (hereafter: RBSCP).

³ R. F. Turner, Woodstown, to IDC, Princeton, September 25, 1838, RBSCP.

become a senior at the college, and he needed to “procure some books so as to keep even with my class.” In addition, he asked for money for “new and mended shoes.” Clawson also wanted to come home for a visit in five weeks, and he needed the carriage fare for that trip. Altogether, Clawson asked his father for ten dollars. He stressed the urgency of his need, noting that he needed the books by the end of the week and that the shoemaker “had already dunned me two or three times.”⁴

In 1840, Clawson, still a student at Princeton, received a scolding letter from his father. On February 17 of that year, Israel Clawson advised his son that the college had just sent a “circular” that did not reflect well on Isaiah’s conduct. The “circular” intimated that young Isaiah had absented himself from prayer meetings and had fallen into “indolent and lazy habits.” “Raise yourself up out of this most infamous practice, obey the rules of the college,” Israel Clawson commanded his son. Not only that, but Israel expressed concern about his son “smoaking” and “laying in bed in the morning while you ought to be up.” “I have nothing further to say,” Israel abruptly concluded.⁵

While at Princeton, Isaiah kept in touch with a classmate from his days at Newark College, George Earle from Queen Anne’s County, Maryland, from whom he may have learned some of those bad habits. On June 7, 1840, Earle, then a student at Jefferson College in Canonsburg in western Pennsylvania, replied to a letter Clawson had written on May 17. Earle invited his New Jersey friend to Queen Anne’s County, suggesting that the two could “puff away all the ills to which the flesh is heir” over a “glass of good Madeira and a fine Havana.” Apparently, Clawson had also become interested in a

⁴ IDC to Israel R. Clawson, August 11, 1838, Salem County Historical Society, Salem, New Jersey.

⁵ Israel Clawson, Woodstown, to IDC, Princeton, February 17, 1840, RBSCP.

young lady. Earle made reference to “that little sparkling eye damsel in Jersey,” mentioning that Clawson “did not pretend to deny the charge I brought against you.”

Clawson must have also expressed some interest in politics to his Maryland friend. Earle resolved that the two “meet in Congress in 1856—or 7,” noting that Clawson had made a good beginning, having already served as a delegate to a Whig convention in New Jersey. Both Clawson and Earle had made the Whig cause their own; the Marylander had attended a Whig meeting in Washington, Pennsylvania, about twenty-five miles from Canonsburg. He noted that twelve thousand people from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia were present who proceeded to form a procession complete with log cabins, canoes, and hard cider, the symbols of the Whig campaign of 1840. Even though fearful that Whigs “might carry this humbug too far,” Earle still rejoiced, with Clawson’s concurrence, that “the people have espoused the cause of old Tip [William Henry Harrison].”⁶

A couple of months later, Earle and Clawson still saw reason for optimism about political affairs. The “Locos” had held a meeting in Washington, Pennsylvania, which attracted only five hundred men, two thirds of whom were curious Whigs.⁷ A Democratic congressman, Albert Gallatin Brown of Mississippi, addressed the paltry crowd.⁸ To Earle, Brown’s address proved only that “fools might be in Congress as anywhere else.” Earle’s letter also revealed that Clawson had decided to pursue a career in medicine, and the Marylander made note of the demanding nature of such a career. Earle himself had chosen to study law, and he took pride that they both had a “fixed

⁶ George Earle, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, to IDC, Princeton, June 7, 1840, RBSCP.

⁷ “Loco,” or “Locofoco” was a often derogatory term for Jacksonian Democrats, often applied to the more radical members of that party.

⁸ Earle misidentified Brown as a Senator. He was serving in the House of Representatives in 1840, having been elected to that body in 1838.

object in view.” From this point on, medicine and politics would be twin ambitions in Clawson’s life.⁹

At some point in his college career, Clawson articulated his political philosophy, expounding a generally Whig position in an essay entitled “The Stability of our Republic.” Clawson praised the still-young American republic as the best plan of government ever devised by humanity. In contrast to the “loose spirit of democracy” in ancient Greece, the American republic was governed by “constitutional restraints nicely united.” Under the “controlling principle of Christianity generally prevalent in our land,” commerce, agriculture, and education flourished. A republic sustained by the intelligence and virtue of its people would resist anarchy, despotism, and civil unrest. Such evils could not shake the “solid basis on which our union rests.”¹⁰

Having completed his studies at the University of Pennsylvania in 1843, Clawson returned home to Woodstown, New Jersey, and began to practice medicine at the age of twenty-one. For ten years, medicine was his full-time profession. Indeed, he was a leading member of the Salem County Medical Society by 1848, when he joined his peers in publishing a table of medical fees. Those fees ranged from twenty-five cents for extraction of a tooth to sixty dollars for certain types of amputations.¹¹ Having established his medical practice, Clawson married, on December 30, 1850, Martha W. Shinn, a daughter of William J. Shinn, who had served in both houses of the New Jersey legislature and also had served as a judge on the Court of Common Pleas.¹²

⁹ George Earle, Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, to IDC, Princeton, August 2, 1840, RBSCP.

¹⁰ Isaiah D. Clawson, “The Stability of our Republic,” manuscript, no date, RBSCP.

¹¹ “A Table of Fees and Rates for Charging Passed by the Salem County Medical Society at Salem on Monday, October 30, 1848,” pamphlet at Salem County Historical Society, Salem, New Jersey.

¹² Thomas Cushing and Charles E. Sheppard, History of Gloucester, Salem, and Cumberland Counties, New Jersey (Woodbury, New Jersey: Gloucester County Historical Society, reprint, 2002), 357.

In 1852, Clawson began to actively pursue his other youthful dream: a political career. Like his father, Clawson affiliated with the Whig party. In 1852, he presided over the convention that nominated John A. Boyle of Atlantic County as the party's candidate for Congress for the First District of New Jersey. A year later, Clawson won election to the Assembly from Salem County on the Whig ticket, defeating two opponents: Democrat Harman Richman and Temperance candidate William S. Vanneman. The Whig National Standard of Salem hailed Clawson's victory, noting that the Temperance candidate, a renegade Democrat, divided that party's vote in the usually-Democratic First Assembly District in Salem County. But the Standard speculated that Clawson may have won without divided opposition, such as his "personal popularity."¹³

When Clawson ran for the Assembly, the Camden and Amboy Railroad dominated political discourse in New Jersey. Chartered in 1830 and organized as a joint company with the Delaware and Raritan Canal in 1831, the state granted the rail and canal companies monopoly privileges over all freight and passenger traffic between New York and Philadelphia. Generally, New Jersey's Jacksonian Democrats supported the company, and the opposition Whigs challenged its privileged position. By the early 1850s, Whigs often identified themselves as the "anti-monopoly" party, labeling the Democrats as the opposite. The question of monopoly rights was coupled with proposals to extend rail service into southern New Jersey, something desired by many of Clawson's Salem County constituents.¹⁴

¹³ National Standard, Salem, New Jersey, November 16, 1853. The vote totals were Clawson, 656; Richman, 595; and Vanneman, 532.

¹⁴ George L. A. Reilly, "The Camden and Amboy Railroad in New Jersey Politics," Ph. D. dissertation, New York University, 1951. For an anti-Camden and Amboy perspective see Hermann Platt, ed., Charles Perrin Smith: New Jersey Political Reminiscences 1828-1882 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1965), 3-33. Several articles examine legal perspectives. See Christopher Gandy, "Can Government be Trusted to Keep its Part of a Social Contract: New Jersey Railroads, 1825-1888," in Journal of Law

Anti-monopoly Whigs made ongoing efforts to challenge the power and privileges of the Joint Companies. Proposals for rail service into Salem County emerged by the fall of 1851. On October 20 of that year, the National Standard reported that an application would be made to the next session of the state legislature to incorporate a company, with 1.5 million dollars capitalization, to construct a rail line from Staten Island, south of Elizabeth Port, to Mount Holly, with added authority to extend the line through Woodbury to a point on the Delaware River in Salem County. To facilitate enactment of the proposal, the writer of the article urged his readers to “elect men free from the dictation of the Camden and Amboy Railroad Company” and its management.¹⁵ Late in November 1851, the same newspaper reported on another proposal to build a rail line from Camden, through Swedesboro and Woodstown, to Salem with a “collateral line” to Allowaystown. Salem countians, the editor asserted, were “behind the age in some matters,” and he implored them not to continue “drag[ging] along through the mud and the mire.”

By the spring of 1852, residents of southern New Jersey were organizing meetings to support the projected rail line connecting Camden and Cape May. The National Standard urged its readers to “awaken from our Rip van Winkle slumber” and embark on a project that “cannot but succeed.”¹⁶ On April 10, 1852, “a large number of influential citizens of West Jersey” assembled in Salem to support the proposal.¹⁷ A month later, on May 11, a convention met in Camden for the same purpose.¹⁸ At the end

Economics and Organization, Autumn 1989, 249-269, and Howard Stoke, “Economic Influences upon the Corporate Laws of New Jersey,” in Journal of Political Economy, October 1930, 551-579.

¹⁵ National Standard, October 20, 1851.

¹⁶ Ibid., March 31, 1852.

¹⁷ Trenton State Gazette, Trenton, New Jersey, April 16, 1852 and National Standard, April 14, 1852.

¹⁸ Trenton State Gazette, May 11, 1852 and The Constitution, Woodbury, New Jersey, May 25, 1852.

of December 1852, a committee appointed at the Camden convention drew up an application for a corporate charter to present to the state legislature, set to begin its January 1853 session. By early February 1853, the legislature had passed a bill to incorporate the West Jersey Railroad Company.¹⁹

In his one term in the Assembly, Isaiah Clawson focused his attention on that preeminent issue. Along with other West Jerseymen, Clawson was evidently concerned that lack of funding would inhibit construction of the West Jersey line. With Clawson's support, the legislature gave the Joint Companies authority to subscribe to West Jersey Railroad Company stocks and bonds.²⁰ Although elected on an "anti-monopoly" ticket, Clawson evidently saw such financing as the only feasible means to fund construction of the new rail line. But Clawson and his Whig colleagues had also set their sights on a much more ambitious effort to connect South Jersey and the New York area.

In February 1854, the Assembly began consideration of a bill to charter the South Jersey Central and Air Line Railroad. The proposed new line was part of a larger rail network that would link New York and the Virginia Tidewater via Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia. The New Jersey portion of this plan consisted of a line from the Raritan River to the Cohansey River, a tributary of the Delaware Bay in Cumberland County. Although a modification of the proposal set forth in October 1851, it would still connect Salem County with northern New Jersey. Debate raged over the real need for such a line, called derisively by some of its opponents the "Sea Serpent." Opponents also argued that the proposal would violate the guarantees given to the Camden and Amboy in its original charter.

¹⁹ Trenton State Gazette, February 2, 1853.

²⁰ Ibid., January 13, 1853.

Clawson actively participated in the debate, strongly supporting the new rail line, but on February 8, 1854, the Assembly adopted an amendment to reroute it toward Tom's River and Absecon, an amendment opposed by Clawson.²¹ Supporters of the Joint Companies evidently wished to keep some distance between the new line and the Camden and Amboy tracks. Concerned about efforts underfoot to scuttle the entire project, Clawson offered an amendment requiring construction of ten miles of track starting at the Cohansey and working northward. Clawson worked with Assemblyman William Parry of Burlington County to convince fellow Assembly members that the new line would not directly compete with the Camden and Amboy and thus violate the privileges granted by its charter.²²

Clawson also presented petitions signed by over 1,200 residents of Salem County supporting the new rail line, calling support for the proposal "the undivided sentiment of the people of Salem." Residents of every township in the county had signed the petitions, and Clawson claimed that he had received no counter-petitions at all. The Salem Assemblyman also implied that he himself, and the rest of the Whig ticket in the county, had won election mainly because of anti-monopoly sentiment. Opponents of the proposal argued that the West Jersey rail line linking Camden and Cape May that would run through Salem County and render the so-called Air Line unnecessary. Clawson retorted that his constituents, though supportive of that idea, would "rather do without the West Jersey than to have it under the threat" of not constructing the Air Line.²³

²¹ The War with the Monopoly: Speeches and Proceedings Concerning the Air Line Railroad and Extension of the Camden and Amboy Railroad Charter (Trenton: William Brown, 1854), 3-5.

²² *Ibid.*, 15-19.

²³ *Ibid.* 35.

Supporters of the Air Line summoned a host of agricultural statistics to support their case. Focusing on counties through which the line would pass, they asserted that the proposed new railroad would serve prosperous, growing markets. For example, Salem County alone had over 145 thousand acres of land under cultivation, on which over 1.2 million bushels of wheat were harvested annually, along with over 248 thousand pounds of potatoes. Despite such evidence, the Assembly defeated the bill by a vote of thirty-four to twenty-three on February 22, 1854.²⁴

The Assembly then proceeded to debate a bill to extend the Camden and Amboy's monopoly privileges until 1869. Clawson sought to attach provisions to this proposal to guarantee that work on the West Jersey line proceeded expeditiously, even though Camden and Amboy president Richard F. Stockton had asserted that extension of its monopoly privileges would ensure completion of the West Jersey line. But Clawson's amendment to require completion of that line in nine years failed by a vote of forty-four to ten.²⁵ Recognizing that the solidly Democratic Assembly would not support his efforts, Clawson sought to delay consideration of the bill for one year, perhaps hoping for an Assembly with more Whigs. That proposal also met with defeat, and the legislature extended the Camden and Amboy's charter and monopoly rights until 1869.²⁶

Clawson's work in Trenton evidently enhanced his reputation, at least among his fellow Whigs. He became a candidate for the United States House of Representatives in the fall of 1854, a race complicated by the rapidly changing political landscape. The Whig party, on the verge of disintegration, still fielded a slate of candidates, as did the

²⁴ Ibid., 28-29, 36 Charles Perrin Smith referred to the bill's defeat "by appliances peculiar to the monopoly." See Platt, 56.

²⁵ Ibid., 46.

²⁶ Ibid., 48, 49, 64.

newly-emergent American (Know Nothing) party. Both parties nominated Isaiah Clawson to oppose Democrat State Senator Thomas W. Mulford of Camden County, the American party doing so first. The Whig Trenton State Gazette commented on Clawson's nomination, calling him a "clear and unequivocal Whig, hitherto uncontaminated by any political chicanery." That newspaper urged Whigs in the First Congressional District to overcome doubts, raised by the American party endorsement, about his Whig credentials and unite behind his candidacy.²⁷

The State Gazette pointed out that the Democratic opposition trumped up Whig disunity, especially opposition to Clawson's nomination. The "Monopoly papers republish every scrap set forth by those who advocate the measure (dumping Clawson)." Their obvious hope was that dissension in Whig ranks would abet Mulford's cause.²⁸ When the Whig convention convened on September 16, it did in fact endorse Clawson but only after some debate about the American party endorsement. Ultimately, his "talents, his high character, his past services in the Whig cause" carried the day, but questions remained about his "parting from old friends for the sake of a nomination to Congress." Others at the convention argued that Clawson's stance on key issues was "not inconsistent with Whig principles," and Clawson won a roll call vote with the support of twenty-six townships to thirteen for his opponent, Thomas J. Saunders of Gloucester County.

The Whig principles that concerned some of the delegates to the convention were stated in a resolution unanimously adopted by the convention. The delegates opposed any tinkering with the Compromise of 1850, viewing the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

²⁷ Trenton State Gazette, Trenton, New Jersey, September 11, 1854.

²⁸ Ibid.

as a “fraud and surprise,” advanced by demagogues “for the purpose of advancing their personal ends and strengthening the interests of slavery.” The Whigs also adopted a nativist resolution deploring appointment to federal offices of “foreigners of questionable character and doubtful fidelity” instead of well-qualified natural-born Americans. The convention also reaffirmed traditional Whig support for protective tariffs and internal improvements. In sum, the convention went on record expressing its confidence that Isaiah D. Clawson would “give a hearty support to those measures that would advance the interests of the District and the State.”²⁹

The Democratic Salem Sunbeam persisted in magnifying the difficulties that accompanied Clawson’s endorsement by two parties. The Democrats no doubt feared, rightly so, that a unified opposition would hurt their candidate’s chances. Thus, the Sunbeam sowed dissension in Whig ranks, insinuating that Whigs from Camden and Gloucester counties wanted a man with “old Whig principles,” who was free from “all entangling alliances.”³⁰

Democrat Thomas Mulford would indeed face two opponents, but not because of disharmony between Whigs and Americans. Rather, the Temperance party fielded a candidate of its own, John W. Hazleton of Gloucester County. The National Standard of Salem frantically urged its readers to support Clawson, calling a vote for Hazleton a vote for Mulford. Hazleton stood “no earthly chance of election,” and voting for him would be “indirectly aiding” Mulford and the “late acts of the Pierce administration with

²⁹ Ibid., September 16, 1854.

³⁰ Salem Sunbeam, Salem, New Jersey, September 15, 1854.

reference to Nebraska and Kansas,” and would put a “willing instrument in the hands of the Monopoly” in Congress.³¹

To hold the support of two parties, Clawson did have to walk a political tightrope. Reports circulated that upon accepting the American nomination, Clawson had called the Whig party “defunct.” The Constitution of Woodbury reprinted Clawson’s acceptance of the American nomination, in which he committed himself to the principles of that party. For the devoutly Whig Constitution, this was sufficient reason to deny him support; if the Whigs were to select another nominee, Clawson “stands pledged as his opponent.”³² The Woodbury newspaper thus continued to suspect Clawson’s loyalty.

Indeed, the editors of the Constitution would not accept the Whig convention’s endorsement of Clawson. “Expediency has triumphed over principle,” they lamented. The editorial also excoriated the one vote per township rule, presumably adopted to aid Clawson’s cause. “The little township of Elsinboro with a population of less than 700” had an equal vote with much larger municipalities in the district. Although affirming their “kindest feelings” toward Clawson as a person, they saw his endorsement as an act “embarrassing and forestalling the Whig party.” Even so, Clawson won the nomination with nearly unanimous support from Salem and Cumberland counties. Camden and Cape May counties gave strong support to Thomas Saunders. Gloucester County was divided, and Atlantic County’s delegates were not present for the vote, although they were “understood to be unanimously in favor of Saunders.”³³

The editors of the Constitution never did support Clawson. They did not put his name “at the head of our columns, where it might have been in deference to our Whig

³¹ National Standard, November 8, 1854.

³² The Constitution, Woodbury, New Jersey, August 29, 1854.

³³ Ibid., September 19, 1854.

friends.”³⁴ Indeed, the editors insinuated that the nomination of Saunders might have averted the decision of the Temperance party to field its own candidate. That party, they argued, would not have opposed Saunders “for he would have been acceptable” to its membership. Saunders himself, though solicited by the Temperance party, “refused any nomination but that of his own party. And there he stands today—a firm, consistent Whig,” presumably in contrast to Clawson.³⁵

Nevertheless, Clawson won election to Congress, based largely on an overwhelming lead in the seemingly hostile territory of Camden County. He also won Salem and Cumberland counties by smaller margins, and he lost Atlantic, Cape May, and Gloucester counties to Hazleton, who won more support than expected. Even the Constitution, though hostile to Clawson, rejoiced at the defeat of Mulford. It attributed the Democratic defeat to the “iniquitous Kansas-Nebraska Act, repudiated even by the staunch Democrats” of the First District.³⁶

When he went to Washington, Clawson entered into a political firestorm. The Congress elected in 1854 reflected the political incoherence caused by the disintegration of the Whig party, the temporary rise of the American party, and the more enduring emergence of the Republican party. The slavery issue split the new Congress nearly down the middle. No party commanded a majority in the House of Representatives and that body deadlocked for nine weeks over the election of a speaker, a position eventually won by Massachusetts Democrat Nathaniel Banks, who, unlike most Democrats, opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. For the first thirty-three ballots for Speaker, Clawson voted

³⁴ Ibid., October 24, 1854. It was customary for newspapers to prominently display names of the candidates they endorsed.

³⁵ Ibid., October 31, 1854.

³⁶ Ibid., November 14, 1854.

for his fellow Whig and New Jerseyan, Alexander Pennington, but he finally threw his support to Banks.³⁷

The debate over the extension of slavery dominated the business of the Thirty-Fourth Congress. Clawson consistently voted against efforts to allow its extension into the territories. On January 26, 1856, Indiana Republican George Dunn offered a series of resolutions that condemned the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and called for the restoration of the compromises of 1820 and 1850. Clawson supported one of those resolutions that called upon the yet-unelected Speaker to affirm this position. He voted for another one stating that restoration of restrictions on the spread of slavery was the only means of “reviving that concord and harmony among the states of the American union which are essential to the welfare of our people and the perpetuity of our institutions.”³⁸ Reflecting the close divisions in the House, the former resolution failed by one vote, while the latter passed by the same margin. The presence or absence of a few members in a closely-divided House often resulted in contradictory votes.

The House also adopted a resolution stating that “any agitation on the question of slavery” by opponents of its extension was “unwise, unjust to a portion of the American people, injurious to every section of our country, and therefore should not be countenanced.” Despite Clawson’s opposition, that resolution won approval by one vote. But later on that same day, when some of the membership had left the chamber, the House passed another resolution calling repeal of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and allowing the expansion of slavery an “example of useless and factious agitation of the

³⁷ New York Times, New York, December 10, 1855.

³⁸ Ibid., January 28, 1856.

slavery question, unwise and unjust to the American people.” This resolution, with Clawson’s support, won adoption by ten votes.³⁹

Later in the session, Clawson reaffirmed his free soil credentials. On July 3, 1856, Congressman David Barclay of Pennsylvania offered a motion to reconsider the previous defeat of a bill to admit Kansas under an anti-slavery constitution adopted by a convention in Topeka. The reconsideration motion won by two votes; the House then passed the bill by a vote of 108 to 97 with Clawson’s support.⁴⁰ Clawson also voted against the seating of the pro-slavery John Whitfield as the territorial delegate from Kansas.⁴¹ Furthermore, he voted to strike out language in an appropriations bill to prevent the use of the military against pro-slavery ruffians in Kansas, but that resolution lost by three votes.⁴²

By 1856, differences over slavery had torn the Whig party apart; northern and southern Whigs simply could not find common ground. As the campaign of that year heated up, Clawson and others elected with Whig support would be compelled to seek a new base of support. In New Jersey, the new Republican party began to organize at the local level, while the American party continued to make its presence felt in state politics. As the election of 1856 approached, the question confronting First Congressional District politicians was if these two relatively new political parties—the Republicans and the Americans—could present a united front against the Democrats as Whigs and Americans had done in 1854.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid. These resolutions sought to quash opposition to slavery.

⁴⁰ Ibid., July 5, 1856.

⁴¹ Ibid., August 2, 1856.

⁴² Ibid., September 2, 1856.

⁴³ Herman Platt notes the presence of five political factions in New Jersey by the mid-1850s: (1) the Democrats, (2) anti-Nebraska Democrats, (3) Native Americans—pro-Joint Companies, (4) National

Although Clawson had won election to the state Assembly in 1853 as a Whig, he had accepted the nomination of the American party in 1854 before the Whig convention even met. By the summer of 1855, he more firmly identified himself with the American cause. He worked with American party leaders such as A. Sargent of Washington, D. C. and Felix Zollicoffer, an American congressman from Tennessee, to formulate party strategy in the Thirty-Fourth Congress. Sargent suggested avoiding a formal party caucus, but he also suggested that Clawson give attention to Zollicoffer's succinct ideas for a party platform: naturalization only after twenty-one years' residence and exclusion of the foreign-born from any position of trust in the United States government.⁴⁴

As a member of Congress, Clawson also worked and corresponded with his South Jersey constituents about both national and local issues. His stance on slavery evidently won widespread support. A neighbor, Albert Bassett of Woodstown, warmly applauded Clawson's stance on the Kansas-Nebraska imbroglio.⁴⁵ Clawson's sister Elizabeth Hires reported that local newspapers generally spoke well of the congressman, adding that their late father would be proud of his son's work. Elizabeth envisioned her brother reaching heights such as those attained by statesmen like Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John Quincy Adams.⁴⁶

Clawson also learned that some, if not all, politics are local. On March 10, 1856, Richard C. Holmes of Cape May Court House wrote Clawson asking his congressman to support construction of a breakwater at Cape May. This project, the subject of a state

Americans—mainly old Whigs, (5) Republicans. After the middle of that decade, the Democrats and an “Opposition” ticket usually contested elections. See Platt, 18-21.

⁴⁴ A. Sargent, Washington, D. C., to IDC, Woodstown, August 22, 1855, MS 798, Special Collections, Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, New Jersey (hereafter: RUSC).

⁴⁵ A. Bassett, Woodstown, to IDC, Washington, January 22, 1856, RUSC.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Clawson Hires, to IDC, June 13, 1856, RUSC.

legislative report in 1844, deeply concerned mariners at New Jersey's southern tip. Holmes pointed out that sailors in the area had no protection from the "heavy northeast gales" that beset coastal New Jersey, and indeed the entire mid-Atlantic coast. Writing at the end of a harsh, cold winter, Holmes noted that the Delaware River had been closed to navigation for over two months; those seeking shelter at the cape had to sail twenty-five miles northward to the cove of the Maurice River. He added that the Cape Henlopen breakwater near Lewes, Delaware, afforded little protection for small vessels. Larger vessels seeking refuge there, coupled with "drift ice," left the small boats and ships "not safe at any time." Noting such obstacles, Holmes remarked that "it's all the same to the little fellow; he must suffer." On a political vein, Holmes noted that approval of the breakwater would abet the cause of Cape May County Republicans.⁴⁷

Holmes's mention of the Republicans in his county gave evidence of the new political environment in New Jersey and across the nation. As in 1854, Clawson would win the nomination of two parties in 1856, but, in the latter year, the Republican party had supplanted the Whigs. The American party, though fading as a national political force, remained a factor in New Jersey politics. Winning the endorsement of two parties again would present both a challenge and an opportunity for the now-incumbent congressman. Presidential politics further complicated the picture, as Americans and Republicans supported different candidates for the White House. The Americans nominated a ticket of Millard Fillmore for President and Andrew Jackson Donelson for Vice President; the Republicans nominated John C. Fremont and New Jersey's own William Dayton. Clawson again, as in 1854, would have to walk a political tightrope.

⁴⁷ R. C. Holmes, Cape May Court House, to IDC, March 10, 1856, RUSC.

But Clawson had gained respect and more widespread support since winning his first term in Congress. Even The Constitution of Woodbury, which withheld its support in 1854, published laudatory comments early in 1856, quoting the National Standard. Noting that both friends and opponents had observed Clawson with the “strictest scrutiny,” the writer noted that the former offered “hearty approval” and the latter found “nothing to condemn.” The article praised Clawson’s support of Nathaniel Banks for Speaker of the House and his conviction that “the North had suffered great injustice at the hands of the South.” In sum, Clawson was “an industrious representative” who would prove a “formidable candidate” if he won nomination.⁴⁸

By June of 1856, Clawson had won the support of South Jersey’s nascent Republican organization. On the 7th of that month, State Senator Joseph S. Franklin of Woodbury noted the need for united opposition to the Democratic presidential nominee James Buchanan. He hoped that Fillmore would decline the American nomination and that anti-Democratic forces would unite behind the Republican Fremont-Dayton ticket.⁴⁹ At the district level, Joseph A. Shute of Mullica Hill in Gloucester County talked to Republicans as well as members of the still-extant Temperance party. To his surprise, he found that both were satisfied with Clawson’s performance in Congress and that both were willing to unite behind the incumbent against the Democratic nominee.⁵⁰

Supporters of John Hazleton, Clawson’s Temperance opponent in 1854, actually abetted his cause in 1856. Joseph Shute noted that in his home town of Mullica Hill,

⁴⁸ The Constitution, Woodbury, New Jersey, April 8, 1856.

⁴⁹ J. S. Franklin, Woodbury, to IDC, June 7, 1856, RUSC. Charles Perrin Smith identified Franklin as a “Stockton American,” willing to work with Robert F. Stockton, a Camden and Amboy executive and nativist Democrat, to control the state Senate in 1855. Stockton opposed the national Democracy while seeking to preserve his company’s prerogatives in New Jersey. See Platt, 63-65.

⁵⁰ Joseph A. Shute, Mullica Hill, to IDC, June 19, 1856, RBSCP.

fifteen “Hazleton men” and seven men who had supported Democrat Thomas Mulford in 1854 now declared their support for Isaiah Clawson.⁵¹ A couple of weeks later, Isaac V. Dickinson of Woodstown reported Hazleton’s assessment that the path was clear to Clawson’s securing the nomination of the new Republican party.⁵² The American party had already re-nominated Clawson by acclamation, commending his support “of the glorious cause in which we are still engaged.”⁵³ The Republicans followed the American lead, nominating the congressman as their own candidate on September 10, 1856.

Clawson faced Democrat Charles Hinline in the election of 1856. Hinline, a Camden newspaper editor and former Assemblyman, had earned a reputation as a vicious partisan who skewered everyone opposed to the Democrats. Clawson himself had drafted a letter to his opponent that made no effort to conceal the antipathy between the two men. In that communication, Clawson defended his stand against the “iniquity” of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, but he also lambasted Hinline’s violation of “the common decencies of life” in his editorial comments. Rather than debate Hinline, Clawson “would as soon enter into a treaty with that obscene bird (here he crossed out ‘buzzard’ in his draft letter) with which you have long been distinguished by your contemporaries.” Clawson concluded, “It is enough I am forced to have you for a competitor.”⁵⁴

Clawson faced another difficult choice in the course of the campaign of 1856, about whom he would support for President. Running on the American and Republican tickets, both parties demanded that he support their respective Presidential nominees, the American Millard Fillmore or the Republican John C. Fremont. Further complicating

⁵¹ Shute to IDC, Jun 10, 1856, RBSCP.

⁵² J. V. Dickinson, Woodstown, to IDC, June 25, 1856, RBSCP.

⁵³ The Constitution, August 5, 1856.

⁵⁴ Draft of letter, IDC to Charles Hinline, c. 1856, RUSC.

matters was the possibility that the House of Representatives would choose the next President if no candidate obtained a majority in the Electoral College. Clawson evidently signaled his intention to support Millard Fillmore. Maskell Ware of Camden and Samuel Bayard of Woodbury both expressed concern about Clawson's intentions. Ware, a Republican, hinted at the possibility of the Republicans nominating another candidate, thus dividing the opposition to Hineline. Bayard, an American, feared that Clawson might shift his allegiance to Fremont and inquired about Clawson's intentions should the House of Representatives actually end up choosing the next President.⁵⁵

By October, rumors had spread that Clawson would first vote for Fillmore in the House and then switch to Fremont. Republican John Peacock still wanted to "nail down" Clawson's intentions in the event that the House of Representatives chose the President. Peacock warned Clawson that some Republicans would not work for him "until this question is answered."⁵⁶ Indeed, the Democratic press had a field day with Clawson's dilemma. As early as July, the Democratic Salem Sunbeam had made note of the "disjointed" condition of the opposition to the Democrats, noting the "folly and danger of a fusion of parties" working together "for a mere temporary advantage."⁵⁷ By October, the Sunbeam's editor poked fun at Clawson's efforts to "ride two horses at the same time."⁵⁸ The Sunbeam also sought to sow discord in the abolitionist ranks of the Republican party. It noted Clawson's ambivalent stance on the slavery issue; he opposed abolition while supporting limits on the spread of the "peculiar institution." The editor

⁵⁵ Maskell Ware, Camden, to IDC, September 25, 1856, and Samuel Bayard, Woodbury, to IDC, September 26, 1856, RUSC.

⁵⁶ J. Peacock, Centerville, to IDC, October 1856, RUSC.

⁵⁷ Salem Sunbeam, Salem, New Jersey, July 25, 1856.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, October 3, 1856.

concluded that if “Clawson is not a genuine woolyhead, we confess our inability to know who he is.”⁵⁹

On Election Day, Clawson easily defeated Charles Hinline. He won the First Congressional District by a majority of 2,327 votes of just over 17,000 cast. He carried five of the district’s six counties, losing only Atlantic County by fifty-eight votes. James Buchanan carried the state of New Jersey but the combined Fillmore-Fremont vote exceeded the Democrat’s total. In the First Congressional District, Clawson’s ability to gain and hold the support of both opposition parties paid off. The district’s voters gave Buchanan a slight plurality in the presidential race; the Democrat led Fillmore by only 260 votes of over 17,000 cast. Fremont won only about half of Fillmore’s total, revealing that Clawson’s support of the American nominee was an astute political decision.⁶⁰

Having won a second term in Congress, Clawson received congratulatory letters from across his district, letters which also sought to take some credit for the victory. One of the first came from Robert B. Potter of Bridgeton, who called the vote in Cumberland County “glorious” to “all conversant with the politics of the county.” Instead of the 200 vote majority for Charles Hinline predicted by some observers, Clawson won the county by 150 votes. Potter pointed out that extraordinary efforts in Bridgeton and Maurice River townships proved crucial to Clawson’s triumph.⁶¹

Even in Atlantic County, where Hinline had bested Clawson, there was cause for some celebration. Nathaniel Disbrow of Smith’s Landing sent Clawson a listing of the returns pointing out “reasons you did not run up with your ticket.” A key reason in

⁵⁹ Ibid., August 8, 1856. “Woolyhead” was a derogatory term applied to African Americans and abolitionists.

⁶⁰ The Constitution, Woodbury, New Jersey, November 25, 1856.

⁶¹ R. B. Potter, Bridgeton, to IDC, November 8, 1856, RUSC.

Disbrow's mind was that Hinline "told about one hundred lies." Additionally, "professed Americans proved traitors to you," saying that "you was a woolyhead and not an American," a charge that ironically strengthened Clawson's support among Republican voters in the area.⁶² Joseph Myers of Camden, Engrossing Clerk of the Assembly, succinctly noted that Hinline looked as though "his time on earth was short," but that "the boys in Camden were greatly rejoiced at the result."⁶³

The lame duck Thirty Fourth Congress convened for its final session in December 1856, less than a month after the new one was elected. Clawson's constituents wrote him about a number of issues, both local and national. Political patronage was always a concern. C. B. Potter of Bridgeton wanted to know the "why and wherefore" of Edward Acton's removal from a postmaster's position, guessing that the removal had been instigated by Charles Hinline. Turning to national matters, Potter called slavery "the main subject of discussion through the rest of your career," truly "the eternal question," or so it seemed, in late antebellum America.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the tariff also emerged as an issue early in 1857. Providence Ludlam of Hopewell Township in Cumberland County expressed his opposition to tariffs as "an infringement on the rights of the farming and producing classes." He claimed "the settled policy of Congress" was to ignore those rights "whenever an advantage is wanted by any other class on the face of God's earth." Farmers and fishermen, Ludlam believed, were hurt by large surpluses of their products, especially those living in the eastern states. Specifically, Ludlam pointed out that Spain would import grain duty-free from the United States if the American government removed duties on sugar and molasses. "Let us have

⁶² Nathaniel Disbrow, Smith's Landing, to IDC, November 11, 1856, RUSC.

⁶³ Joseph Myers, Camden, to IDC, November 15, 1856, RUSC.

⁶⁴ C. B. Potter, Bridgeton, to IDC, December 15, 1856, RBSCP.

a reciprocal treaty in our favor sometime,” Ludlam implored.⁶⁵ Clawson did support some relief in tariff rates, voting for a measure to add to the “free list” a number of commodities.⁶⁶

On January 27, 1857, Thomas C. Garrett of Atlantic City again raised the issue that had occupied the attention of Jersey shoremen for some time, and would continue to do so for some time to come. A “terrible storm” had just swept through the area, resulting in severe beach erosion in several locales. Garrett sought federal support for a harbor and protection of the lighthouse in his area. He expressed special concern about “the beach above the lighthouse,” where erosion was particularly alarming. Garrett called for federal support for the construction of a breakwater at the point of Brigantine beach to alleviate the problem.⁶⁷

In spite of his busy congressional schedule, Clawson still found time to keep abreast of events at home. His neighbor, Isaac V. Dickinson of Woodstown, informed Clawson, a Presbyterian, of a religious revival underway early in 1857 when the Congressman was still in the nation’s capital. The “reformation” in the town had led to the reduction of “tippling and dissipation” by about one half.⁶⁸ Not everyone hailed the “reformation.” That same day, Omar Borton, another neighbor, informed Clawson that even the game of “seven-up” was “stigmatized as the game of the devil.” He urged Clawson to “take an uncertain number of good round oaths” before leaving Washington, enough “to last you until next December” when Congress reconvened. Borton, evidently

⁶⁵ P. Ludlam, Hopewell, to IDC, January 25, 1857, RBSCP.

⁶⁶ Weekly Patriot and Union, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, February 25, 1857.

⁶⁷ Thomas C. Garrett, Atlantic City, to IDC, January 27, 1857, RBSCP.

⁶⁸ I. V. Dickinson, Woodstown, to IDC, February 11, 1857, RBSCP.

not a man of exemplary piety, hoped that “one Congressman elected for two terms would undo all that two or three ministers have done in much shorter time.”⁶⁹

Politics, however, did go on. Apparently, talk had surfaced of Clawson’s becoming a candidate for governor of New Jersey. Isaac V. Dickinson mentioned that possibility in his letter of February 11, 1857, to Clawson. He noted that the Congressman could obtain the nominations of both the Republicans and Americans as he had in the congressional race of 1856. Even though Dickinson viewed the talk as a “pretty sure thing,” Clawson did not become the “Opposition” nominee for governor.⁷⁰

Clawson did face criticism for one of his first decisions in the new Thirty-Fifth Congress. He opposed the Republican choice for Speaker—Galusha Grow of Pennsylvania. Coming to Clawson’s defense, the Constitution of Woodbury pointed out that Clawson’s vote would not have made a difference. Indeed, the Constitution criticized Grow for his opposition to the principles of the American party and his “free trade proclivities.” Clawson had maintained the “measures and principles of both parties” (American and Republican). Although the Constitution desired a “hearty, cordial union” of the opposition to the Democrats, it opposed “ultraism” of any kind, apparently considering Galusha Grow an “ultraist.”⁷¹

Clawson began his last year in Congress—1858—again preoccupied with the issue that preoccupied most Americans—slavery. On January 29, Edward A. Acton of Salem wrote his Congressman a long letter about reaction in New Jersey to the ongoing

⁶⁹ Omar Borton, Woodstown, to IDC, February 11, 1857, RBSCP.

⁷⁰ Dickinson to IDC, February 11, 1857, RBSCP. Dickinson’s letter confirms efforts by Americans and Republicans to unite against the Democrats. Such efforts are pointed out in Charles Perrin Smith’s accounts and are mentioned by William Gillette, Jersey Blue (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

⁷¹ Woodbury Constitution, December 22, 1857.

crisis in the Kansas territory. “The Kansas resolutions multiply before our legislature,” Acton noted. Acton hoped that the legislature would pass a resolution to “rebuke our Senators, as well as the administration,” who must certainly have known that they “misrepresent the views of nine tenths of their own party in the state.” The blatant pro-slavery stance of the Buchanan administration had led many New Jerseyans to be more accepting of the popular sovereignty stance of Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois. Indeed, the “Little Giant” from Illinois had more admirers in New Jersey than “two years ago, I ever supposed he would have.” Although Clawson had opposed “popular sovereignty” and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, he undoubtedly found Douglas’s ideas far less obnoxious than the Buchanan administration’s opposition to any restrictions on the “peculiar institution.”

The shift toward Douglas was, in Acton’s mind, one of the most astonishing changes of public sentiment “that you have ever witnessed.” Acton almost sounded rhapsodic. “It must be a great man, whose outspoken words are listened for with eagerness by a mighty nation of people—by the high and lowly—the toiling day laborer of our own country and the crowned heads of Europe.” Despite Douglas’s greatness, Acton believed that like Henry Clay, the senator from Illinois would never become President. Nonetheless, Acton believed that Douglas’s name would go down in history in a “prouder position” than the presidency. His efforts to resolve the slavery question would give him historic immortality.⁷²

Samuel Reeve of Salem also wrote Clawson about the slavery question. Reeve questioned the concept that all southerners were attached to the “peculiar institution.”

⁷² E. A. Acton, Salem, to IDC, January 19, 1858, RUSC. It is unlikely that the now Republican-leaning Clawson shared Acton’s sentiments about Douglas.

Opposed to slavery himself, Reeve believed that many southerners also opposed it but “dare not publicly advocate” that position. Reeve based his thinking on observations he made while living in the South back in 1824. At that time, he had heard sons of planters acknowledge that “they admired [how] the Yankies (sic) brought up their sons and daughters” and that “slavery was a curse to theirs.” Reeve saw an opportunity for the Republican party if it could exploit and capitalize on that latent southern discontent. In his heart, Reeve thought slaveholders were cowards “to be pitied.”⁷³

Clawson continued to oppose the extension of slavery, particularly in the Kansas territory. Efforts to grant that territory statehood, with a pro-slavery constitution drafted in the town of Lecompton, confronted the Congress in 1858. Clawson opposed such efforts. On April 1, 1858, the House of Representatives approved a proposal by Senator John Crittenden of Kentucky that would grant statehood on the basis of a new referendum on the state constitution. Crittenden argued that the matter was “greatly disputed” as to whether the Lecompton document was “fairly made, or expresses the will of the people of Kansas.” Clawson supported the amendment, joined by most of the congressional opposition to the Buchanan administration.⁷⁴ The House version of the bill set up a standoff with the Senate, and Kansas did not win admission to the Union until 1861, after eleven southern states had seceded from the Union.

Isaiah Clawson made one of his most noteworthy speeches not about slavery, but about a local issue, the often-discussed breakwater at Cape May. On May 19, 1858, he delivered a speech to the House discussing “the preservation of life and property on the coast of New Jersey.” A “civil appropriations bill” was again under consideration, and

⁷³ Samuel Reeve, Salem, to IDC, February 14, 1858, RUSC.

⁷⁴ New York Times, New York, April 2, 1858.

Clawson took the opportunity to advance a project strongly desired by residents and seafarers in South Jersey. Clawson's speech in support of the breakwater and other measures to protect life and property along the shore might well have been the most widely-reported of his career. He assembled a wide range of arguments that included political, economic, and humanitarian ones.

He first presented to the House resolutions passed by the state legislature in Trenton supporting "the better protection of life and property upon her [New Jersey's] coast." Representing, as he did, a district bounded by the Delaware Bay on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other, Clawson noted that "few subjects are reported with so much interest by my constituents." He alluded to the dangers of New Jersey's long coastline, and pointed out that north-south commerce along the entire east coast "has to run the gauntlet of those dangers." Indeed, the Jersey shore "teems with the recital of many a full admiral and rich merchantman" who had become "the prey of the ruthless sea tempest."

What was to be done? Clawson noted that station houses and accoutrements were "liberally distributed along the beach," but the metallic lifeboats at those locations were not adequate. Clawson pointed out that a new design developed by Richard C. Holmes of Cape May, a "self-righting and self-bailing life and surf boat," would prove much more serviceable in the "tumultuous surf that ever breaks on our shores." Clawson urged the committee to provide funds to purchase the "Holmes boats" for life-saving stations along the Jersey shore.

Clawson also urged Congress to take advantage of new technology to keep mariners abreast of changing weather conditions. He noted that research had proven the

general northeastward track of Atlantic coastal storms. He noted that weather conditions could be telegraphed to the Observatory in Washington and from thence to stations “hovering upon the coast.” Nearby vessels could be warned and would then have “opportunity to find a safe harbor” or “stand out to sea.” In any event, Clawson urged that knowledge of the weather patterns and new technology be coupled to save lives.

But the most urgent need remained that of a safe harbor. The “low sandy beaches” along the Jersey shore afforded no such natural harbor. Therefore, Clawson urged the House to appropriate 50,000 dollars for construction of a breakwater on the Delaware Bay side of Cape May. In spite of the “embarrassed state of the public treasury,” Clawson noted that the House Commerce Committee’s report stated that the measure was “absolutely essential to the public good.” Clawson emphasized that construction of the breakwater would benefit the federal government itself, since government vessels were among those at risk in the Atlantic storms.⁷⁵

Clawson’s speech won him acclaim, not the least among his own constituents. Edward A. Acton of Salem called it a “capital speech.” Insertion of the appropriation into the committee’s report, constituted, in Acton’s view, a “great achievement.”⁷⁶ Clawson’s neighbor Isaac V. Dickinson of Woodstown added his compliments.⁷⁷ Outside the First District, Henry Hopper of Newark noted that he had perused the speech and wished the South Jersey congressmen success.⁷⁸ Despite Clawson’s initial success in

⁷⁵ Speech of Representative I. D. Clawson, reported in the Trenton Gazette, Trenton, New Jersey, June 1-3, 1858.

⁷⁶ E. A. Acton, Salem, to IDC, June 6, 1858, RBSCP.

⁷⁷ I. V. Dickinson, Woodstown, to IDC, May 25, 1858, RBSCP.

⁷⁸ Henry Hopper, Newark, to IDC, June 5, 1858, RBSCP.

committee, Congress did not appropriate the funds in 1858, and Clawson's successors would unsuccessfully continue his efforts.⁷⁹

Isaiah Clawson chose not to run for a third term in the House of Representatives in 1858. Two men—American John H. Jones and Republican John T. Nixon—vied to be his successor. Jones, a staunch nativist, straightforwardly sought Clawson's blessing. On February 13, 1858, Jones wrote a long, "private" letter to the incumbent clearly seeking his support. First, Jones expressed his belief that Republicans would not gain the support of Douglas Democrats. Based on a miniature "test of that in Camden," Jones heard of no "Locos" who would abandon the Democracy for a Republican candidate. On the other hand, he knew of "several Locos" who signed the constitution of the Ward Association of the American Party. Jones noted that even Democrats who opposed their party's position on the admission of Kansas would not publicly condemn the Buchanan administration. Additionally, Jones hoped that Clawson would work behind the scenes to shore up support for him in Salem County.⁸⁰

In spite of Jones's apparent close relationship with Clawson, John T. Nixon of Cumberland County, a former Whig and Assembly Speaker, had the inside track for the nomination. Thomas B. Jones of Mannington Township reported that Salem County was "solid for Nixon" and that even Americans there opposed Jones.⁸¹ Jonathan Ingham agreed with that assessment, pointing out the Jones had no hope of gaining Republican support and the "cry all over the state is 'Union.'"⁸² Jones also faced allegations that he had agreed to support Assembly candidates pledged to support Democratic Senator

⁷⁹ Charles Perrin Smith noted that an effort to fund a breakwater in 1872 was nothing more than a job of "notorious political schemers," which was "abandoned at the doors of Congress." See Platt, 220.

⁸⁰ J. H. Jones, Philadelphia, to IDC, February 13, 1858, RUSC.

⁸¹ Thomas B. Jones, Mannington, to IDC, April 12, 1858, RBSCP.

⁸² J. Ingham, Salem, to IDC, April 13, 1858, RBSCP.

William Wright in exchange for support for Jones's congressional bid.⁸³ Clawson ultimately decided to steer a middle course and even offered to run himself if both Jones and Nixon withdrew their candidacies in his favor.⁸⁴ Ultimately, however, both Americans and Republicans united behind Nixon, and he won Clawson's seat in the elections of November 1858.

After leaving Congress, Clawson remained a potent force in New Jersey politics. William Frazier of Camden noted that many political leaders in his county supported Clawson for a vacancy in the United States Senate in 1859. "Get [William] Dayton out of the road, and you are safe," Frazier told Clawson.⁸⁵ But John C. Ten Eyck won the Senate contest, and Clawson's name was then again set forth as an "opposition" candidate for governor. Jacob R. Freese, editor of the Trenton State Gazette and Republican, advised Clawson against running as a "straight out" candidate, cautioning him that such a decision would "ruin you politically for all time."⁸⁶ If nominated by a united opposition, Clawson would win hands down. Clawson, however, did not run for governor, but consideration of his name for two statewide offices gave an indication of his important role in state politics.⁸⁷

After those setbacks, Clawson apparently never again sought office, but he did identify himself with the Republican party after the final demise of the American party. Republican party leaders often consulted him for political advice. On May 5, 1862, Charles P. Smith of Trenton, former Salem National Standard editor and clerk of the state Supreme Court, wrote him about the appointment of one of Smith's cousins to the Court

⁸³ See Platt, 23 and 97.

⁸⁴ IDC to 'Ike' (further identification unknown), June 7, 1858, RBSCP.

⁸⁵ William Frazier, Camden, to IDC, April 9, 1858, Salem County Historical Society, Salem, New Jersey.

⁸⁶ J. R. Freese, Trenton, to IDC, April 18, 1859, RBSCP.

⁸⁷ Charles S. Olden became the state's first Republican governor.

of Errors and Appeals. But Smith also discussed the formation of a state Republican ticket. He asked Clawson to assess political conditions in South Jersey and then give advice about them to party leaders. As for Smith's cousin, Smith requested Clawson to "secure his acquaintance with Gov. [Charles] Olden."⁸⁸

Six years later, in 1868, Smith wrote Clawson again, this time concerned about a "systematic effort" to cast Salem County's vote in the Republican state convention for Cornelius Walsh for governor. Smith set forth a case against his candidacy. Smith identified Walsh as a "foreigner," and that fact would jeopardize support "from the large American sentiment" that still remained within Republican ranks. Furthermore, Smith saw "men not usually speaking for the party" behind Walsh's candidacy. He did not know a "single prominent Republican in this section who favors the nomination" and predicted that Republican congressional and legislative candidates would go down to defeat on a Walsh-led ticket. Smith urged Clawson to resist "a half dozen men" to whom Salem County "has entrusted all of her political interest." These men, according to Smith, abused that trust, coming to Trenton to "make merchandise of it." Smith clearly believed that only a man of Clawson's stature could rectify matters in Salem County.⁸⁹ Ultimately, John Blair won the Republican nomination, only to lose the general election to Democrat Thomas F. Randolph.

In addition to lingering nativist sentiment, other issues raised in antebellum years continued to shape New Jersey politics after the war's end in 1865. In 1870, John W. Hazleton, the Temperance candidate who Clawson had defeated in 1854, sought the Republican nomination for Congress. Alexander Wentz, writing from the Customs

⁸⁸ C. P. Smith, Trenton, to IDC, May 5, 1862, RUSC.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, May 15, 1868. Walsh did not win the nomination, losing it to John Blair, who lost to Democrat Theodore Randolph in the general election.

House in Philadelphia, asked Clawson to throw his support behind Franklin Westcott, arguing that three factors worked against Hazleton. First, he had been a “temperance man,” and support for that movement had now waned. Second, he had a reputation as a “standing candidate,” perhaps a reference to perennial office-seeking. And third, Wentz reminded Clawson that Hazleton had jeopardized the ex-congressman’s own chances of victory back in 1854.⁹⁰ In spite of these unsettled old scores, Hazleton did win the Republican nomination, and the general election, in 1870.

Isaiah D. Clawson died in 1879, still highly respected for his life’s work as a physician and his career in politics. During that career, he had to make choices typical of those confronting politicians in South Jersey and across the state. With the demise of the Whig party, he embraced the politically ephemeral American party. He sought the support of the new Republican party, attempting to unite the fractured opposition to the Democrats. Clawson did in fact gain support from both factions of the opposition in both of his campaigns for Congress, perhaps a tribute to both political dexterity and personal popularity. During his four years in Congress, Clawson addressed issues ranging from slavery to concerns about the treacherous waters along the Jersey shore. In so doing, he successfully navigated the equally treacherous waters of New Jersey politics.

⁹⁰ Alex Wentz, Philadelphia, to IDC, August 17, 1870, RBSCP.