

TEDDY ROOSEVELT STUMPED FOR REPUBLICANS IN WINCHESTER

By Ellen Knight¹

On Oct. 28, 1884, Theodore Roosevelt came to Winchester to make a speech at the Republican Rally at Lyceum Hall.

At the time, he was seventeen years away from becoming president, sixteen from being elected governor of New York following his famous exploits as a Rough Rider in 1898. When he came to Winchester, he was just 26 (having observed his birthday the day before) and had hardly any national reputation, being an assemblyman for New York with only two years' experience in politics.



In fact, it was so early in his career that the Winchester newspaper ignored him entirely in reporting the Republican rally.² The *Woburn Journal* simply gave his name as one of the announced speakers. Fortunately, Boston papers took some note of his speeches.

The Winchester speech came at a significant time in Roosevelt's career. It was in 1884 that Roosevelt entered the national political scene. In May he served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Chicago, his first national convention, and began forging a friendship with Henry Cabot Lodge, Chairman of the Massachusetts Republican State Committee and candidate for Congress. That October found him in Massachusetts stumping for the Republican ticket and for Lodge.

In 1884 the contest for president was between Grover Cleveland and James Blaine. While Roosevelt had opposed Blaine's nomination and for some months was unwilling to take part in the campaigning, by October he had decided that the party took precedence and he would speak in support of the Republican ticket.

Before coming to Winchester, Roosevelt spoke in Brooklyn, Malden, and Melrose, returned to New York and spoke there and in Newark, and returned to Massachusetts to speak in Winchester. He concluded this series of speeches before the election on Nov. 4 with one more in Elmira.

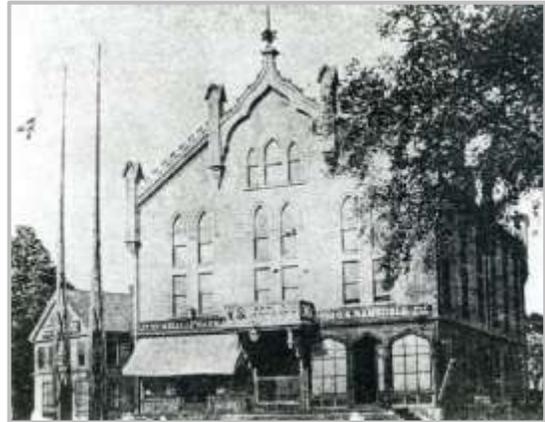
The Massachusetts rallies focused on Lodge, with whom Roosevelt had a close working relationship and who enjoyed more local support than Blaine.

Before the speeches began, the Stoneham Brass Band played several times in the square. The hall was reportedly packed with a crowd that heard from Lodge and Editor Clark of the *Boston Traveller*, the two speakers featured in the Winchester newspaper, and from the Hon. A. W. Bear of Boston and Roosevelt, the two noted as "announced speakers" by the *Woburn Journal*.

“A rousing audience greeted Hon. Cabot Lodge on Tuesday evening at the Town Hall,” the newspaper said, referring to Lyceum Hall since Town Hall had not yet been built. The hall reportedly could seat 450. “The gentleman received a royal reception and made an argument as temperate as convincing.”

Lodge reportedly explained the merits of the Republican Party “to the satisfaction of the huge assemblage” and several of his points were summarized in the local newspaper.

Roosevelt also took his turn at extolling his party. As reported elsewhere than the local papers, in the Winchester speech he took the opportunity to criticize the Democratic party and declare it was his own party which had the better track record. He reportedly said that the Democrats were opposed to the recharter of national banks and legislation for the prevention of the spread of pleuro-pneumonia among the western cattle herds. He noted that the next administration would probably appoint four members of the Supreme Court and that he wanted a court that would support the right laws.



Lyceum Hall

Roosevelt is reported as saying: “We are asked to trust the promises of the Democratic Party for what it will do in the future rather than to judge it by what it has done in the past. ... We know that it is the party that tried to destroy the Union, that supported slavery, that favored greenbackers, that opposed putting the finances of the country on a sound basis, that has committed about every sin it was capable of committing for the last twenty-five years.”³

Claude Moore Fuess, writing in *The New England Quarterly* (July 1932), stated that in his Winchester speech “Roosevelt made one of the most remarkable statements in our political history,” which he quoted as follows.

“I believe, if you take the last twenty-four years, that future historians will hold it to be the heroic period of American history. There never has been a time that the nation has striven so hard, has suffered so much and gained so much. There never has been a time that so much good has been done and that so much bad has been undone as in the past twenty-four years, and it has been done by the Republican Party.”

Fuess said history would not bear out this statement since “the Republican Party, from 1866 to 1885, was not entirely a benevolent and humanitarian organization.” However, Roosevelt was doing what he had determined to do, boost his party.

The rally reportedly “closed with cheers for the candidates and playing by the band.”

When the election came, Blaine lost by 37 electoral votes. Lodge also lost but in a few years won additional support and represented Massachusetts in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1887 to 1893 and in the Senate from 1893 to 1924. While senator, Lodge was able to work again on party politics with Roosevelt, this time president of the country.

¹ This article © 2018 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Oct 31, 2007. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

² This may be the reason the event escaped mention in Henry Chapman's *History of Winchester*.

³ Quoted in Carleton Putnam's *Theodore Roosevelt*.