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## INSIDE THE RING: BISBEE-LEE CORRESPONDENCE, FEBRUARY-APRIL 1880

by PETER D. KLINGMAN \*

THE ELECTION YEAR 1880 was critically important to Republicans nationally and in Florida. Despite the abandonment of southern Republican party organizations in the wake of Rutherford B. Hayes's narrow victory and the resulting compromise in 1877, neither the national G.O.P. nor Florida Republicans were politically moribund. On the national level three Republican giants were in pursuit of the presidential nomination though none were to achieve it - Ulysses S. Grant, considering a third term, a move especially popular with southern blacks and carpetbaggers, John Sherman, secretary of the treasury in the Hayes administration, and James G. Blaine, "the Plumed Knight," powerful United States senator from Maine.<sup>1</sup>

In Florida the Republican candidates for governor were also influential politicians. The party's choice was one which mattered, for it was not yet an era in which Florida Democrats, divided themselves between moderate ex-Whigs led by George Drew and old-line Democrats under William D. Bloxham, were assured of victory. The two G.O.P. candidates who were being mentioned most prominently were Simon B. Conover, retiring United States senator, and William Ledwith, Jacksonville postmaster who, despite previous pro-Confederate sympathies, had come out supporting Grant for a third term presidency. Ledwith hoped thereby to win the endorsement of the state's black Republicans.<sup>2</sup>

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1. George N. Mayer, *The Republican Party, 1854-1966*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1976), 198-200.
2. Edward C. Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893* (Gainesville, 1976), 62; *Savannah News*, n.d., quoted in Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, April 27, 1880. The article cited former Florida tax commissioner J. B. Stickney as a possible candidate. Harrison Reed, former governor, was facetiously mentioned in the Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, February 3, 1880.

What follows is an exchange of letters concerning these and other issues. They were written between February and April 1880 by Congressman Horatio Bisbee, Jr., representing East Florida (second electoral district) and Joseph E. Lee, the powerful black Jacksonville Republican who controlled much of the Negro vote in the second district. Both men were members of the "ring" faction of the state Republican party, that group of federal officeholding Republicans generally opposed to the patronage powers of the governor and other state officials.<sup>3</sup>

The Bisbee-Lee exchange is of historical significance, for the letters shed new light on G.O.P. thinking in Florida in the post-Reconstruction period. Moreover, they reveal something of the personalities of the men themselves and of the nature of the relationship that existed between them. Horatio Bisbee had settled in Florida following the Civil War and had established a prosperous legal practice in Jacksonville before his entry into politics; he was always a central figure in the bitterly divisive intra-party struggles among Florida Republicans during and after Reconstruction. Indeed, East Florida Republicans commonly divided into pro- and anti-Bisbee forces as each congressional election approached.<sup>4</sup> Joseph Lee, on the other hand, had been one of the first Florida Negroes to pass the state bar examination, and he wielded considerable influence among Florida freedmen. During Reconstruction and in the years after 1876 Lee held a series of federal appointments in Jacksonville. He also served as chairman of the Duval County G.O.P. and secretary of the Florida Republican party continuously until his death in 1920.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the correspondence between Bisbee and Lee confirms that intra-party feuding continued to remain the Florida Republican party's central weakness in the post-Reconstruction period as it had been in the years after the Civil War. The letters which follow are in the Joseph E. Lee Memorial Library and

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3. For a discussion of Republican factionalism, see Williamson, "Independence: A Challenge to the Florida Democracy of 1884," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXVII (October 1948), 131-56.
  4. "Autobiographical Sketch of Horatio Bisbee," misc. mss box 35, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville; Wanton S. Webb, ed. and comp., *Webb's Historical, Industrial, and Biographical Florida*, 2 vols. (New York, 1885), I, 131.
  5. Biographical sketch of Joseph E. Lee, *Jacksonville Magazine*, January-February 1976, 22-24; Webb, *Webb's Historical, Industrial, and Biographical Florida*, I, 37.

Museum, Jacksonville. Spelling and punctuation have not been altered.

Feby 9 '80

Dear Colonel:

I suppose you will be quite surprised to hear from me and I should not trouble you [with?] the facts, that above my name follow writings to the *Patriot* from this City, I think as trying to leave the impression on your assistant that I am working to advise with Mr. Durkee for Congress. <sup>6</sup> I do not think I need assure you, that I shall do what I can to return you to Congress, it matters not what others may say, and just now I have as much as I can do to make some support for my family. I hope you may succeed in getting your seat because you were honorably elected to it. <sup>7</sup> Let me hear from you at anytime.

Joseph E. Lee

P.S. I am doing what I can to have Republican success, when, I shall sink into insignificance as far as politics are concerned. -L.

Washington, D.C. Feb'y 17, 1880

Friend Lee,

I was not in the least surprised to receive yours of the 9th inst.

I commenced a letter to you yesterday at N.Y. but finding I had not the time to complete it before [leaving?], abandoned it till here. The subject was not in my personal interest however. I was not surprised for the reason that I was not unconscious that a few wouldbe malcontents have underestimated your sagacity, independence, & foresight. I have never believed they would succeed either in convincing you that they had a grievance or of making you an appendage to one of their insurrections. <sup>8</sup> I have

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6. Joseph Durkee came to Florida with the Union army and served as the Freedmen's Bureau agent in Alachua County before moving to Jacksonville.
  7. House Miscellaneous Document 26, 46th Congress, 1st sess., records the testimony involving Bisbee's contested 1878 congressional race against Noble Hull.
  8. Political opposition to Horatio Bisbee in 1880 referred to, while not stated explicitly, was from one of two possible sources: in Alachua County, Leonard Dennis and Josiah Walls, ex-congressmen who eventually would run against Bisbee in 1884; or in Duval County, where a "reform" faction of Republicans led by businessman Jonathan C. Greeley, former Governor Harrison Reed, and Negro leader Emanuel Fortune

no malice, hatred, or ill will towards anyone. I have or may have committed errors of the head, but my political course is untainted with any intrigue with democrats for personal ends or even with an impure party thought. It must have occurred [*sic*] to the reflecting mind that no man ever had a harder struggle to give effect to the votes of a people or to teach our enemies to respect us than I have. Not only contested seats involving large expenditures, but a democratic Senate & House, and an administration that does not appreciate our condition. Had I consulted my own wishes & interests, I should have abandoned the fight after 1876, but I could not do so & respect myself, much less those who expressed their wishes at the ballot box.

Let me say now that if we win in 1880 or not, you cannot do as you suggest. The struggle to preserve the results of the war for the next ten years will be a momentous one, and your position is such that you will have to bear your part of the burden & share the honors of the victory when one [?]-I thank you for what you say, but I have not had the least concern respecting your attitude.

If I am renominated I shall continue fiercer than ever for success, but if this convention <sup>9</sup> is of the opinion that another can be selected, possessing more elements for success, or who is more devoted to the cause, I shall not pine over it nor attempt to make mischief.

We must move cautiously in the matter of nominating a governor. I do not look upon the subject in a place-limiting aspect. What we want is a man, who when elected, will give a *calm, dispassionate, [?] and honest government* under which colored men can have a place on the jury & thus put an end to sending them to the penitentiary for stealing a turnip, to their whipping and mal-treatment through democratic cussedness & save our school system-our only hope-from destruction. We ought to win on that issue alone. And we want none in office who will not work for our party supremacy when work is needed.

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had been formed. See Peter D. Klingman, *Josiah Walls: Florida's Black-Congressman of Reconstruction* (Gainesville, 1976), 126; Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age*, 65-66. *Jacksonville Union*, n.d., quoted in Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, March 16, 1880, was concerned about two Republican county slates in Duval County.

9. The East Florida second district convention was held in Jacksonville, May 10, 1880.

Some have thoughts that I should be nominated. *I do not think so* and for many reasons that appear cogent to me, I have taken myself out of that race. *I must insist on it.*

I believe I can name a ticket that will win. *Our candidate will be counted out & will be put in by a quo warranto after a democratic cabinet has been appointed, who will not resign.*<sup>10</sup>

*This I predict,* and you can see for such a fight we want a calm, stately, persistent man, whom no obstacle will oppose and no terror alarm. A man *who has smelt gun powder and smiled at the blue smoke of the enemy* is, I fear, only fit for such a work. To ignore the appeals of a personal friend and pleasant acquaintance is a hard thing to do, but in a great crisis such firmness is necessary.<sup>11</sup> The conviction here grows stronger and stronger that *the presidency may turn on Florida's vote*, in other words, the possible destiny of a country may depend on it. Hence we should be cautious.

It is probably [clear?] to you that I have regretted that you will not return where your influence would be greater perhaps than it is,<sup>12</sup> and I have struggled to have you return, but the *complications* were such that I could not control it: of this however you are familiar. I think it policy & right to remove a growing misimpression that our victory this year will be an easy one. I do not believe it, and such a feeling may damage us immensely. - I shall get my seat but when I cannot specify.

H. Bisbee, Jr.

Feby 20th '80

Dear Colonel:

Yours of recent date came to hand and I assure you, I was quite pleased to hear from you. As you say, and as I believe, we are to have one of the hardest, if not the hardest, that we have ever had in this State. I am willing to my [material destroyed] as a Republican [material destroyed] and the consequences be what they may.

10. *Quo warranto* proceedings refer to the recovery of a political office through the courts following a contested election.

11. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, March 30, 1880, speculated that Bisbee was supporting Dennis Eagan of Madison County for the Republican nomination.

12. Joseph Lee in 1880 held two federal patronage positions in Jacksonville—deputy collector of customs and deputy collector of internal revenue.

As to our standard bearer in the great gubernatorial contest, that we must soon [decide?]. I do not know what person you favor, but almost everyone concedes that you would be the proper man.<sup>13</sup> Some of us however know the great sacrifices that you have already made and the greater one that you would have to undergo and therefore do not press it.

I came to the conclusion long since that we must have as our gubernatorial standard bearer, one to the manner born, and, I think you can readily perceive my reason for this. We are the 'outs' and what that means [material destroyed] and we must get as many supporters and direct and indirect friends and supporters as possible. We can not ignore the facts, nor disregard it, that the democracy will lose much of their argument, if it can be called such, when they [material destroyed] . . . be forced to unseat at the head of our ticket a strong man, and, yet as they say, "one of their own."

Many of us think that Genl. Ledwith is the best available man, and [?] with effort to nominate him. Our leaders are so reserved that we cannot find what man they would wish us to support, so the general means of the people is being drawn closer and closer to the General, so much so, that I am inclined to think he will be nominated by acclamation if the people's voice is not stifled as it was at Madison.<sup>14</sup> It is my aim & shall be my earnest effort to have success for the whole Republican cause, and if I can be of any aid to you, let me know.

I believe I could be of much service to you and the Republican cause at large, if I were made a special or local State agent of some kind, say for instance, of the Post Office or Customs, or any other thing. This is often done, and Secretary Sherman would do it, I have no doubt, if it were called to his attention. He might see the advisability of such a thing, as there would be no confirmation.

Joseph E. Lee

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13. There is no direct evidence linking Bisbee to any candidate for the Republican gubernatorial nomination, only that he clearly opposed William Ledwith.
  14. The Republican state nominating convention in 1876 in Madison resulted in a "bolters' convention" that had temporarily split the party between two gubernatorial candidates-Governor Marcellus Stearns and Senator Simon Conover. Conover, however, withdrew that September. See Klingman, *Josiah Walls*, 110-11.

Washington, D.C., Feb'y 26, 1880

Friend Lee,

Yours of the the 20th at hand. Secretary Sherman has become a little timid in his discretionary appointments from adverse near-proper criticisms. I hope to secure you a position through an increase of deputy collectors Int. Rev. I have been as anxious to help you as you are to have it, but the difficulty is to find something that will not take you out of the State. As to the governorship - I have talked with Gen'l Ledwith very fully on this subject and as he will tell you, I am inclined not to commit myself. Duval County should exercise a powerful influence in the convention. Her citizens will have to furnish a large portion of ordinary work for the campaign. It should send a strong delegation, and I am inclined to think should act as a unit. I expect to see you & talk the matter over before the convention meets.

I like Gen'l Ledwith personally but have had doubts as to his strength. I fear he would be furiously assailed, and perhaps any other candidate will.

I have studied the question somehow and believe that the nomination of a Southern man would concentrate a firm [?] against "Scalawags," & thus relieve the "carpetbaggers." For this reason I have favored a Southern man if we can find one that will stand firm.

Your views as to my position are correct.<sup>15</sup>

Whether I shall be seated this session can be accurately predicted about two weeks from now. I do not doubt that I shall be sometime before *the 9th of March 1881*.

H. Bisbee, Jr.

*Confidential*

Washington, D.C., March 8th 1880

Friend Lee,

My anxiety for the successful devotion to our cause, moves me to write you *in strict confidence*, which I ask you to keep, whatever may be your actions to other gentlemen. During two campaigns as a candidate for Congress, *I never made a pledge or promise of office* to any individual.

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15. Bisbee's rejection of the idea that he himself would become the Republican gubernatorial nominee.

But as I have for several months formed an intention if I am elected to Congress again, I will elect a Pres. *to very prominently* recognize your race by your appointment to one of the higher Federal offices. I do not think it improper to try as to you. I wish to add that I intend and shall do it, however great may be our friendly differences or *pending* questions before its people, or however divergent our course may be as to a State ticket.

If there is a man in Florida that will do more, or more effective work to carry our State ticket than I will, I do not know where he is; and in view of the blows that I have given and taken in the past 15 years on the stump, in private life, and in the courts, I have no doubt that my fidelity to our party will not be deemed to spring from personal interest entirely. As you and others have assured me that I should be renominated for Congress on which assurances I can doubtless rest my interests, without any special effect on [?]. First, personal interest would, to an ageable mind, dictate that I should have little to say [regarding?] State matters.

But strange as it may appear, *the success of a formal and able Republican State ticket* will be of more personal value to me, and a greater victory, than its defeat though I will be re-elected in the latter event.

I have therefore concluded today this, the manner in which our county conventions have been called seem to me well calculated to produce chaos with its resulting consequences. Personal hostilities, bitterness of feeling, and a complete villification of the influence of Duval's delegation in conventions, and especially the alienation from our cause of two or three hundred voters in Duval County inclined towards me, but without strong party attachments, and easily repelled. It certainly never was *in the power of a committee* of 16 to resolve this fire if that number should constitute a quorum. Such a proceeding is wholly void. The committee might authorize a selected subcommittee to act for them and vest it with full power, but generally in that case, the subcommittee is vested with inside powers.<sup>16</sup>

Such irregular proceedings furnish the dissatisfied with the strongest possible ground for ignoring its action and proceeding [?]. This must be considered. Again it will be looked upon as *an*

16. Apparently the "reform" faction called for an early county convention without the consent of the county executive committee.

*act of desperation and as an exhibition of weakness* on the part of Ledwith's friends which others will readily seize upon and reject to his detriment elsewhere. Nor is it necessary. If the real sentiment (not manufactured) of the mass of our voters in Duval is for Ledwith, then he has nothing to fear in having a convention regularly called on full and ample notice. Duval, as I understand it, will present no candidates for Gov. save Ledwith, and *it will be the duty of every delegate* to stand by him, those whose first choice is not Ledwith, as well as those whose first choice is for him. He will thus have the influence of a solid delegation. I beg you to consider this calmly and dispassionately uninfluenced by those whose advice springs from personal interests or aspirations. Remember that a party rupture in Duval will disgust and drive from us hundreds of voters in all parts of the State, especially those who will look upon it as premonition of defeat. We have everything to gain as a party by having a full meeting of the committee and a convention regularly called; say about the 20th of April, and *nothing to lose by it.*<sup>17</sup>

I think only a few of us are counting too certainly on success. *It is an imagined context at best* and without unanimity of action, and a ticket that will command the support of what may be to me the non-partisan voters, we shall be fearfully whipped: and [?] not get that material aid from the National Committee which we are sure of, with unity of action and a solid front.

Please see Garvin and consider this matter-with reference to your appointment to some position, I can see that the prospect is exceedingly good on the commencement of the next fiscal year, but not certain before then.<sup>18</sup>

With reference to the Presidency I suppose there is no doubt that Florida is for Grant. I wish to add that I have no *personal* choice for Governor. My only wish is this: it is necessary his nomination shall not detract from his strength and that it shall not be a manufactured one but either spontaneous or deliberate exercise of judgement.

H. Bisbee Jr.

17. The convention was held on May 5, 1880. See *Jacksonville Union*, May 6, 1880, quoted in Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, May 11, 1880.

18. William Garvin was the principal of the LaVilla school and a member of the Duval County Republican executive committee.

Mar 12 '80

My Dear Colonel :

I received your letter, and I assure you that I was quite pleased to hear from you and to read that what you said in your letter. The Committee will meet tomorrow and I am almost certain they will endorse all that was done the other day.<sup>19</sup> I should have answered your other letter but for the fact that I left for Madison, Monticello, and Tallahassee, and on my return, I found your letter of the 8th inst. which, I answer you, I shall keep *strictly confidential* as you request me. I have sufficient confidence in you to believe that if you make a promise to anyone that you will keep it, and it matters not what emnity persons may undertake to create between us, we understand each other & can work with each other.

Our Convention is called so early for the purpose of giving Grant a Boom in our State. Senators Conkling and [?] think that our State Convention is put off too far and I use [the?] words of the former in a letter to one of us where he says that if we wish Grant our nominee, we must agitate and call our own. Mr. Sherman would not have any chance if our Convention meets now; nor would Mr. Blaine because the people here do not know them. There will be a full meeting of the Committee tomorrow, and I shall write you at once as to their action. Hoping you continue to enjoy good health, and soon obtain that which is yours of right-your seat in Congress, and thanking you for your kind appreciation,

Joseph E Lee

Washington D.C. March 17 1880

Friend Lee:

Yours of the 12th, mailed on the 14th, is at hand. What I say to you, you can rely upon and you will not be disappointed. I care nothing about newspaper gossip.

I understand well the object of the early meeting in Duval; not only to give Grant a boom, but those jealous of Ledwith, and those do not believe he is the strongest man to nominate for Governor think that he is hurraing for Grant - to promote his own purposes. My anxiety for success in Florida and in the

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19. There is no record of the proceedings.

nation, together with my natural caution, may make me cowardly-but-I confess I think it unwise and unsafe at present to instruct delegates either for Congress, Governor, or President.

Penn. is the only State, *safer for the Republican ticket*, that has influence for Grant, and even a change of eleven voters there would have defeated insurrections, and this too, with gigantic power personal, political, and financial to back it. This shows a strong opposing current. There is scarcely and [*sic*] Grant, Blaine, or Sherman man, who, when driven to the point, will not admit that *Washburne is the wisest nomination to make.*<sup>20</sup> All concede his nomination would be equivalent to an election. With any other there is doubt. Why take an uncertainty? *I tremble* when I think what our condition in Florida would be with a democratic *Pres.*, with the Dist. Attny., Marshals, Judges for the Federal Court in their control. We can get along with a dem. Gov. providing we have a rep. Pres. - infinitely preferable to rep. Gov. and dem. Pres. Why then should we take any risk! Florida's delegation will neither nominate nor defeat Grant's nomination nor will instructing county delegates have any effect on other States. The State is small and insignificant comparatively.

Grant will be nominated, if at all, by a *grand rush* - a vote approximating unanimity. But how are we, here are republicans in Penn., N.H. (a *close State*) and other States that in 1876, in State conventions, clearly pronounced their unalterable opposition to a third term, to avoid being put on the defensive and compelled to apologize, a damaging position to be in.

Again, while Blaine is strong in the West, East, and Penn., Roscoe Conkling is the lion in his path in N.Y., standing like a demoralizing terror between Blaine and the White House. He is accused of personal antagonisms stronger than party fidelity.

Let public attention be turned to the *fact that it is a cause we are fighting for and not a man* - for a national government in full life and vigor - that shall not have to draw its sustenance from the [breasts?] of the States, if willing, and if unwilling, perish from the earth. In *fini*, for delegates from States not safe for republican tickets to combine and force against the judgment of States that are & must be relied upon to elect would be a prodigious insurrection.

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20. Congressman Elihu Washburne of Illinois.

I would make Grant Pres. tomorrow if I could, but I shrink from taking a risk and being placed on the defensive where there is no necessity for it. With Washburne as a candidate, we can be *fiercely* aggressive throughout the campaign. I wish you could agree with me, but I shall not quarrel with you if you don't - *I may err.*

H. Bisbee, Jr.

[Author's note: Joseph Lee's letter, March 22, 1880, written to Bisbee is too far damaged to be edited. The onion-skin is blurred almost beyond recognition; however, it is a report to the congressman of the Duval County convention that had been held on March 13. In one portion still partly readable, Lee apparently informed Bisbee of his resentment of Edward M. Cheney, chairman of the Republican state central committee who, according to Lee, claimed that Jacksonville blacks had little influence in state politics. Lee boasted to Bisbee that he had managed, in contrast to Cheney's notion of influence, to have caused Horatio Jenkins to be elected a Florida delegate to the national G.O.P. convention scheduled for Chicago in June 1880. <sup>21</sup>]

Private

Washington, D.C. March 28, 1880

Friend Lee,

Yours of the 22nd at hand. I feel like shaking your hand for what you say about Gen. Jenkins. He is one of the truest and most unselfish republicans in Florida and of more real ability than he is generally credited with. I have helped him all I could since democratic rule. I should like to see him President of the [?] Convention. I regret too [*sic*] see personal antagonisms generated among republicans, but in politics they seem unavoidable. Every person looks upon affairs from a different viewpoint and is too apt to quarrel with his neighbor because he does not agree with him. I have tried to avoid this, but of course if I were wantonly and intentionally provoked-it is human nature to bear it impolitically I think. Cheney is in dead earnest for the success of our party, but he is too apt perhaps to pay too little

21. Horatio Jenkins was a Republican carpetbagger who had been an early member of the Union-Republican Club in Jacksonville and had held an appointment as a collector of internal revenue.

respect to the opinions of others. If Duval has a delegate to Chicago, I think you should go, if you want to. The recognized colored leaders should represent their race and our course there. I do not care much who goes, so that they are worthy and intelligent men. Florida will have little if any influence in that convention, and I do not think any of the Southern States should.

I am more concerned about our home affairs and consent that the North should be allowed to elect the *man, who must be elected by their votes*, if at all.

I do not know how far you are personally committed to support Ledwith, but with my view of the requisite conditions and character of our ticket for success, I am constrained to approve his nomination. I did not want to allow any quarrel or rupture in Duval, but my judgement has been and is now against Ledwith's nomination. I believe it would be exceedingly weak. Some are supporting him now as the only means of giving prominence to the Grant boom, but have no confidence in the prospect of his nomination or his capacity to guide the Ship of State if it were possible to elect him. I repeat, I shall not quarrel with those who disagree with me, but I shall oppose his nomination honestly, for the reason I believe it would be an enormous blunder or misfortune. And if I could talk with you I believe I could make you see at least this - I am sincere in it. My view is that the Congressional convention should be called for the 10th of May at Jacksonville. I shall not be present and shall rely only on my friends to represent my wishes. I have no war to make on any men unless they take particular pains to misrepresent and misconstrue in my absence, as I fear a few impotent spirits have done.

Just when I shall come to Fla. I can't say, but hope to before the conventions assemble.

H. Bisbee, Jr.

Private

Washington, D.C. April 7, 1880

Friend Lee,

I hear that some evil-minded persons are endeavoring to fill your mind with apprehensions that I feel hostile towards you personally, and am going to attack you so. *There is not a word of*

*truth in it.* I do not blame you personally for your course of late politically and have repeatedly said so here. As you were situated, I do not see how you could have done otherwise. On the other hand I received a letter I left home for being a Grant man and come to Washington a Grant man, and as I have written and said, would make Grant President for four years from next March, if I had the power.

But-I am surprised at the attitude of the north and west (from which the election votes are to come) towards Grant and no thoughtful man can ponder over the situation without doubting a *democratic President would, I fear, make the South a hell for you & me* and it is the highest patriotism & the highest Statesmanship and devotion to party to avoid taking a risk if possible. For these reasons I wrote you that Washburne was our safest nominee & for these reasons I am opposed to instructing our delegates and not out of hostility of the man, but from the facts.

Then again I come to learn that it is openly asserted that I am a pronounced *Blaine man* in order to injure me with those who are for Grant. *No one has any authority to assert that I am a Blaine man.* I shall do what I can to effect such a nomination as will secure a [?] on the President question and make it a certainty as far as possible that our nominee will be elected and shall guard against enthusiasm for or devotion to me now, warping my judgement. I was abused by democratic newspapers all summer, fall, & winter up to the time this morning, which either to make me distrust you and to convince me that you are doing your utmost to prevent my nomination to Congress.

I do not believe it, as your own letter and those of others are directly to the contrary. And if the time comes when you think party or your personal interest requires that I shall not be nominated, I rely on you to say so to me. Differing with you as to nominations for governor, I frankly wrote you so, and my convictions against Ledwith's nomination do not spring from any prophetic visions or fancies but from my knowledge [?]. [Author's note: There is a large break, probably material lost.]

The latter gentleman I have not seen nor been to his headquarters since in Washington, no matter what any lying whelp may say to the contrary.<sup>22</sup>

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22. James G. Blaine.

Permit me again to repeat what I said in my last-that I wish you could properly remain inactive as to Ledwith's nomination until I can see you.

I notice that Conover has abandoned Sherman.<sup>23</sup> Would be glad to hear on receipt of this. I am determined here to prevent our destruction by democratic federal appointments, and I hope it will not be forgotten by those who think I ought to come home.

H. Bisbee, Jr.

Jacksonville, Fl April 8th, 1880

Dear Colonel:

I received your letters of recent date and should have answered both sooner, especially the first, but that we have been very much engaged in our municipal affairs. As you perhaps have already learned, we have succeeded and the [whole?] of our ticket has been elected. I shall ask to be made City Attorney, but not with any expectation of obtaining it. The City Council will meet tonight, and I shall notice who vote against me and [?] them and their friends in the future. You have not to fear that anything will come from me or my friends injurious to your interests, but you have to watch others, as it were those of your own household. My efforts are going towards your nomination and your election.

Grant or Washburne will offend some but I prefer Grant and like most of my race look to him. I do not know how this delegation will go-instructed or not, but I do not think that it should be understood when they leave for Chicago that they [material destroyed]. The General is making a strong pull and I assure you that it will be hard work to beat him. I went into this fight in earnest & must stay until the man is [material destroyed]. I know him to be a good friend, and think he will make a good Governor. Whoever is nominated, I think, we must all support or elect if possible. Let me hear from you again.

Joseph E. Lee

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23. Alva A. Knight to Simon B. Conover, March 6, 1880, John Sherman Papers, Library of Congress manuscripts division. Knight's advice to Conover to abandon Sherman because of the overwhelming support of Duval County Negroes for Grant was apparently heeded.

Washington, D.C. April 12th, 1880

Friend Lee,

Yours of the 8th at hand. I had heard of our voting in the city and wrote Jenkins immediately to support you for attorney before I knew your position on it. Will write Durkee today.

You ought to have it, and nothing but cowardice will prevent it—at least it seems so to me. Do not misunderstand me as asking you to break any pledge you may have made to Ledwith, or break any promises, if any has been made. One should be certain in making them but when made should be securely kept. After nominations are made, if anyone should bolt, "*Shoot him on the Spot:*"

There may be cases saying ex-chieftains, but they are rare. I have no doubt the nominees, whoever they may be, will be supported by the party. If Ledwith is nominated, he will find no man in the State who will strike harder for him than I shall. But I shall endeavor to secure the nomination [material destroyed] . . . elements of our party and make a stronger governor if one elects him. I thank you for what you say with reference to myself, and in spite of every effort made to cause me to distrust you, my confidence has not been shaken. I understand what you mean when you say I must watch others and they have been watched & will be, and will be found harmless. Every one has the equal right to make his own political bed, but when made he must sleep on it.

As to the Presidential questions, before our convention meets, Grant will either be deemed nominated or will be out of the race entirely. Thurlow Weed's letter in last Friday's *Tribune* - an old, true, and [?] friend of Grant, has proven a heavy blow against the latter.<sup>24</sup> I was quite surprised to see it.

H. Bisbee, Jr.

*Private*

Washington, D.C. April 13th 1880

Friend Lee,

In further answer to your last, I wish to say a word with refer-

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24. Although New York Republican strongman Thurlow Weed opposed Grant, at the national convention in Chicago in June, Grant remained a strong candidate for a third term, leading Blaine and others from the second through the twenty-eighth ballots; see Mayer, *The Republican Party*, 201.

ence to instructing delegates. We should elect men that will not barter & sell, and say to them, "at your peril, be true to the cause you represent, and if you barter and trade, your political grave will be ready on your return." While the sentiment among Florida republicans is understandably for Grant, in view of the revolution in public sentiment which is evidently going on in the republican States north, I think it unwise [?] instruct. A convention should be a *deliberative body* and with positive instructions there is no reason for deliberation. I hope you will form a convention in Duval to be held late in April or the first of May. Indeed, it seems to me, that if the convention is held as late as the 8th of May, we shall have a more active expression of sentiment than at an early day.

As far as my nomination is concerned, I want people to have ample time to consider and ponder over it. It seems to me from all I can hear that there is too much confidence of success. This may be a course of danger, and I see no ground for such confidence especially in our district, which is close and nip & tuck at best. If we can get our voters registered in the first district there is a fair margin for accidents, I am

H. Bisbee, Jr.

Events that followed the time frame of this correspondence provided both Bisbee and Lee with partial victories. Simon Conover won the Republican gubernatorial nomination, but William Ledwith was nominated as the party's candidate for lieutenant-governor. However, once the Democrats settled upon William Bloxham as their gubernatorial candidate, there was little doubt about the outcome of the election. He carried thirty-three of Florida's thirty-nine counties and won a popular vote margin of more than 5,000 votes.<sup>25</sup>

Neither Ulysses Grant nor Elihu Washburne received the G.O.P. nomination for the presidency at the June national Republican convention, nor did John Sherman or James G. Blaine.<sup>26</sup> The candidate was Senator James Garfield, a dark horse from Ohio who won on the thirty-sixth ballot.

Bisbee did win renomination to Congress and, despite a con-

25. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 28, 1880.

26. Mayer, *The Republican Party*, 201.

tested election struggle with his opponent Noble Hull, he was seated on January 22, 1881. At the same time, Joseph Lee received the Duval County Republican nomination for the Florida state senate, and won with ease in the general election.<sup>27</sup>

With a new political era developing in the post-Reconstruction South, Bisbee and Lee's influence in Florida politics began to wane. Bisbee ran again successfully for Congress in 1882, but lost two years later and decided to retire from public life. He returned to his law practice and died in Jacksonville in 1916. Lee continued his active involvement in the Florida Republican party until his death in 1920, but as the party itself declined in political importance, so did Joseph Lee. In his later years, however, Lee, like Bisbee, devoted more energy to civic affairs in Jacksonville.

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27. *Bisbee v. Hull*, House Misc. Doc. 26; *Jacksonville Union*, May 6, 1880, quoted in Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, May 11, 1880; *ibid.*, November 16, 1880.