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Kathryn Allamong Jacob. *King of the Lobby: The Life and Times of Sam Ward, Man-About-Washington in the Gilded Age.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. 212 pp. $40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-9397-1.

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The Romantic of the Lobby

"I do not say I am proud," the lobbyist Sam Ward told a House Ways and Means Committee hearing in 1875, "but I am not at all ashamed–of the occupation. It is a very useful one." With committee members distracted off and on by his familiar diamond-studded sapphire ring, Ward explained his methods."We keep up a certain circle of friends," he testified, "and once in a while an opportunity comes of getting something that is of real service, and for which compensation is due and proper" (pp. 120-121).

Lobbying required attentiveness to the routines of Congress, subtle but persistent advocacy, and careful construction of atmosphere and alliances. Lobbying by a top-rank practitioner also required a lot of money. This is why, as Kathryn Allamong Jacob documents, Ward's clients mainly included banks, railroads, telegraph companies, insurance companies, and other interests with deep pockets. At the height of his influence, Ward worked on retainer for five or six clients for around $3,000 per session plus expenses. In addition, he accepted freelance jobs for between $250 and several thousands, again plus expenses. Only a few peers earned similar sums, and these operated much more quietly. The so-called King of the Lobby–a nickname that Ward gleefully Latinized into "Rex Vestiari"–knew that he was unusual. He was a "solitary vase," in the words of an admirer, the columnist Emily Briggs. Washingtonians like Briggs who detested the "scaly serpent of the lobby" singled out Ward as having "not the slightest resemblance" to most practitioners, even though the political effect of his work tended in the same direction. His lobbying dinners, Briggs noted, radiated the same "spiritual essence" as his sister Julia Ward Howe's poem, "Battle Hymn of the Republic" (p. 146). Ward made lobbying into a romantic art.

From the republic's early days, lobbying had an unsavory reputation, but its special infamy in the Civil War and Reconstruction eras arose above all from scandals that involved direct financial favors for politicians, as in the Credit Mobilier affair or the blunt payoffs of railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington. Such outright corrupton was always unusual, as Ward and other defenders of lobbying's basic legitimacy insisted. In the main, nineteenth-century lobbying was a precarious business run by assorted brokers, lawyers, and claims agents. Reporters commonly doubled as lobbyists and public relations agents. Esteemed members of the Washington press corps had few scruples about planting stories favorable to clients, a practice that at times shaded into journalists blackmailing businesses with threats of bad press. Rumors abounded of women lobbyists trading sex for votes. Much better documented are depressing tales of widows drearily pursuing tenuous claims that might pay off for themselves or their children.

The top rank of lobbyists usually were behind-the-scenes political operators who traded on their connections, such as Republican lawyer William E. Chandler, the future navy secretary and New Hampshire senator. Or they were consultants whose public and private influence rested on their acknowledged expertise, such as the railroad engineer Grenville Dodge. Ward stood in marked contrast to both these types of disciplined professional. Besides money, his main interests were social and aesthetic. He craved recognition and adored being at the center of important happenings. He had no discernible political ambitions. His value lay in his convivial personality, his exquisite taste in food, especially fashionable French cuisine, and his talent for entertaining, especially at clients' expense.

A patrician Democrat in the New York City mold, he moved easily among Republicans, a consequence of his upper-class New York background, which made him familiar from youth with William Seward, William Evarts, and other major New York Republicans. Republican

congressman James Garfield, a former college president, was drawn to Ward by their shared love of Horace. Democratic senator Thomas Bayard, an austere small-government conservative, was appalled by Ward's lobbying for federal subsidies to business, but he appreciated Ward's humor, taste in food, and especially his gift for friendship. Indeed, Ward's life and career illustrate a theme that historians of gender emphasize in contrast to the distorted stereotype of distant Victorian males. Nineteenth-century American men valued the capacity for intense friendship, and much of Ward's influence came from the fact that politicians–in a lonely occupation in a competitive city–could connect to him as their friend.

In different periods, women have performed strategic political functions as salon or society hostesses. In the masculine atmosphere of Victorian politics, Ward occupied an analogous role, trading on his skill as a host and conversationalist. "Sometimes for a fee, sometimes as a favor," Jacob writes, "Sam brought guests together around his table and let a good dinner, good wine, and good company educate, convince, launch schemes or nip them in the bud, or overcome obstacles." He proclaimed himself "the gastronomic pacificator." Indeed, recalled journalist Ben Perley Poore, "the dinners at which he presided furnished occasions to bring face to face political opponents accustomed to avoid each other, but unable to resist the *bon homie* which sought to make them better friends." Even Illinois congressman Joseph Cannon, later the flinty, conservative speaker of the house, was charmed, recalling that Ward "always had plenty of food and drinks and never asked anyone to help him out" during evenings of easy conversation (pp. 80-81). To Ward, the menu for a lobbying dinner was "a plan of campaign, dependent upon the numbers of the enemy who will be reduced to capitulation by the projected banquet" (p. 78). During the 1875 Ways and Means hearings, Ward explained, "At good dinners people do not 'talk shop,' but they give people who have a taste in that way a right, perhaps, to ask a gentleman a civil question, and get a civil answer, to get information that his clients want, and that can be properly given" (p. 121).

Like most other mid-century Washington lobbyists, Ward hoped for steadier employment. His conviviality, adaptability, and linguistic facility suited him for the State Department, so long as someone else controlled the funds and watched for intrigues. In the first half of 1861, he performed a series of discreet tasks for his old friend, Secretary of State Seward, including a risky intelligence trip through the South in the weeks after Fort Sumter. Yet his Democratic affiliations precluded a job offer. So Ward reluctantly focused on the profession that made him famous, at first sponsored by another loyal friend, the New York capitalist Samuel Barlow.

The shabby condition and mundane atmosphere of Washington before the vast public works and beautification projects of the 1870s redounded to Ward's advantage. Allying himself with talented caterers such as Belgian immigrant John Welcher, Ward brought Delmonico standards to the federal city, where official dining had hitherto been "torture," as Emily Briggs recalled. "Is it strange," she added, "that this man became an idol to the public men whose constitutions were impaired by the dyspeptic dinners of 'high society"' (p. 76)? As important, Ward provided politicians and officials an outlet for their own intellectual and aesthetic aspirations, which the routines of politics do not readily absorb. His activities distorted government toward the well-connected and privileged. Still, it was probably preferable that he did so by manipulating politicians' higher qualities than by absorbing their energies in vulgar diversions, a regular feature of tawdry lobbying scandals.

Jacob's explanation of the freewheeling lobbying style of the Reconstruction era draws upon such historical studies as Margaret Sue Thompson, *The "Spider Web": Congress and Lobbying in the Age of Grant* (1985), and Mark Summers, *The Era of Good Stealings* (1993). As Jacob reiterates, the Civil War accelerated the expansion of federal influence in the country's economic and social life, which in turn multiplied the private interests interacting with legislators and federal officials. Ill-staffed and ill-informed, chronically short of time and money, congressmen were vulnerable to sophisticated efforts to sway them. Most lobbying in the Grant era and after thus consisted of the mundane activity of supplying members of Congress and federal officials with reports and information shaded toward the perspective of the provider. This was insidious largely because the government lacked the capacity to generate its own studies, while few public-interest groups existed to counter the evidence provided by business. The logical response, not directly relevant to Sam Ward's story but which began to emerge in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, was to enhance the public sector's ability to generate and evaluate information, for example by expanding congressional staffs and federal bureaus with scientific or technical functions. As "the vanguard of the social lobby" (p. 163), i.e., a lobbyist specializing in introducing influential people to one another and forging alliances, Ward epitomized a dimension of lobbying that will create political and ethical hazards as long as people running governments are susceptible to fellowship, favors, and flattery. The thoughtful

Ward was among those who began to wrestle with how to account for lobbying as an enduring corollary of the expanded scope of the nation-state. He supported the proposal of Massachusetts senator and former treasury secretary George Boutwell for a "bar of the two Houses of Congress," analogous to Great Britain's parliamentary bar (p. 134). In 1875, the reformist Massachusetts congressman George Frisbee Hoar pushed through the House the first measure for the registration of lobbyists, which would eventually grow into a flawed but nonetheless enduring approach adopted by the states as well as the federal government.

Ward's effectiveness in Gilded Age Washington rested upon distinctive social skills and a stock of anecdotes acquired through decades of misadventures created by his own grandiosity and irresponsibility. Born in 1814, Ward was the spendthrift son of a large, well-connected New York banking family. After student years abroad in which he earned a German PhD in mathematics while burning through vast amounts of his indulgent father's money in developing his refined European tastes, Ward returned to New York in 1836 to enter the family banking house with a reluctance that revealed personal insight. Even as he squandered his huge inherited fortune, Ward–kindhearted and generous to a fault–gathered a wealth of devoted, if perpetually anxious friends, including the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Ward's first wife, Emily Astor (John Jacob's granddaughter), died in childbirth in 1841, after which the distraught young man rushed into a second marriage with a beautiful but dubious New Orleans woman, prompting the Astors to cast him out of their segment of polite New York society. By 1847, Ward had ruined the family bank through his own extravagance and lack of investment sense. Estranged from his second wife, he made his way to California, where he succeeded briefly as a dealer in mining supplies until that business burned in 1851. The next years were filled with hardships and mysterious schemes that took him from California to Central America and Europe and finally to Paraguay as secretary of a U.S. mission in a financial dispute. The only fluent Spanish-speaker in the American delegation, Ward made a clandestine deal to lobby on behalf of the Paraguayans, which is how he landed in Washington in 1859 with his sapphire ring, culinary knowledge, and repertoire of stories.

Through his years as King of the Lobby, the hopeless profligate continued to live beyond his impressive income. In the late 1870s, a millionaire friend from California days–whom Ward had helped when both were down on their luck–provided the aging adventurer with a new fortune more than ample for a halfway-organized person to retire in luxury, but Ward soon squandered this in another spectacular wreckage. He fled New York a final time to escape creditors and died in 1884, a copy of Horace under his pillow, in the Italian residence of his nephew, the novelist Francis Marion Crawford. Behind this picaresque tale is an equally quintessential nineteenth-century story of delusion, wasted opportunity, heartbreak, and loneliness. Estrangement and death stalked this man, who despite his grasshopper optimism knew he had himself to blame. His daughter with Emily Astor and his two sons with his second wife barely saw him before all three predeceased him. The powerful men who befriended him had their own wrenching experiences and could identify with the sadness behind the lobbyist's entertaining conversation and endless kindness and generosity.

Jacob, whose previous books include the *Capital Elites: High Society in Washington, D.C. after the Civil War* (1995), fuses deep knowledge of Washington with sensitivity to nineteenth-century culture in a way that enables her subtly to portray and explain Ward. One wishes for more details, especially of Ward's adventures in the 1850s in California and Latin America. Julia Ward Howe, however, seems to have destroyed several chests of her beloved but wayward brother's papers not long before her death in 1910. Jacob thus needed to piece the story together from the papers of his family, friends, and collaborators. Gaps in documentation made this book's life-and-times approach more appropriate than a standard biography, with Jacob providing useful portraits of Washington and of Congress and lobbying.

Normally, one avoids remarking upon the exceptional error in such a wonderful book, but one mistake is relevant. On page 131, she attributes a cynical description of lobbying in Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's *The Gilded Age* (1873) to "heartless lobbyist 'Colonel Mulberry Sellers."' In fact the speaker is an unnamed New York capitalist who has taken advantage of Sellers and his naïve collaborator, Harry Brierly. Based loosely on one of Samuel Clemens's cousins, Beriah Sellers (Mulberry in the play version) was a kindhearted, incompetent schemer, the western equivalent of the hopelessly romantic New York sophisticate. Had the two met, Ward would have treated Colonel Sellers to a fine dinner and uplifting conversation. They would then have ensnared one another in some grandiose scheme.

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