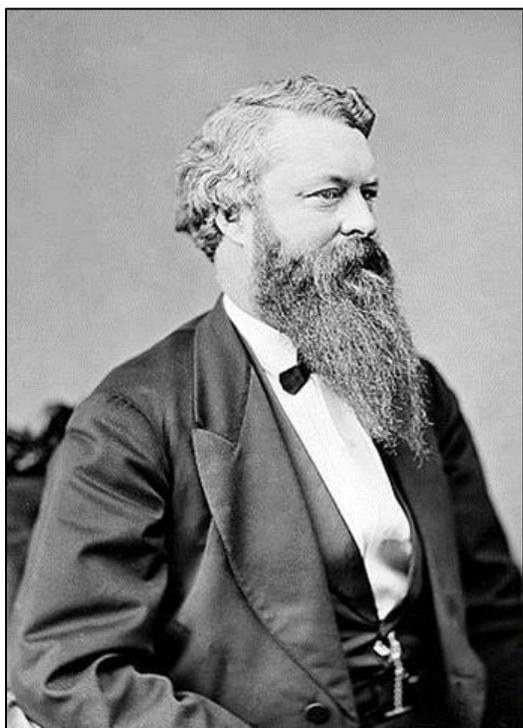


*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

## **The Only Cabinet Member to be Impeached**



**Representative William Belknap**

He was promoted to brevet major general by the end of the war. In 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant appointed Belknap to his cabinet as secretary of war. This position left him in charge of the Native American trade in the American west.

The portrait of [William Belknap](#), the only presidential Cabinet member to be impeached, hangs in the old judicial offices in the Iowa State Capitol.

But Belknap wasn't born in Iowa. Rather, he migrated to Keokuk after graduating from Princeton University in New Jersey in 1848 and being admitted to the bar in 1851.

Belknap joined a law practice in Keokuk. In 1857, he served one term in the Iowa Legislature and was commissioned as a major at the onset of the Civil War.



**Portrait in Capitol**  
**Photo courtesy of Josh Wilson**

In 1876, Belknap was accused by his former college roommate and at that time a member of Congress, Heister Clymer, of "selling" a post tradership\* to Caleb Marsh for \$20,000.

The Sioux City Daily Journal.  
PUBLISHED 1876.      SIOUX CITY, IOWA, FRIDAY MORNING, MARCH 31, 1876.      PRICE FIVE CENTS

**WASHINGTON.**

**The Articles of Impeachment Against  
Belknap Presented to the  
House.**

They are Five in Number and are all  
Based on the Fort Sill Trans-  
actions.

**Ex-Minister Schenck Talks Emma  
Mine to the War Committee--Cap-  
ital Notes--Congressional  
Proceedings, Etc.**

**THE BELKNAP IMPEACHMENT CASE.**

WASHINGTON, March 30.—The im-  
peachment articles are five, worded in  
the usual legal phraseology.

**THE FIRST ARTICLE**

charges that William W. Belknap, while in office as Secretary of War, had power and authority, under the laws of the United States as Secretary of War, to appoint a person to maintain a trading establishment at Fort Sill, a military post of the United States; that Belknap promised to appoint one Caleb P. Marsh to maintain said trading establishment at this military post, and thereafter Caleb P. Marsh and one John S. Evans entered into an agreement in writing, substantially as follows:

Here the articles of agreement are set out *in extenso* that thereafter on the 10th of October, 1870, said Belknap, as Secretary of War, did, at the instance and request of said Marsh, appoint said John S. Evans to

**MAINTAIN SAID TRADING ESTABLISHMENT** at Fort Sill, and in consideration of the appointment Belknap, on or about the 2d of November, 1870, unlawfully and corruptly received from Marsh \$1,500 and at divers times thereafter, that is, on or about the 7th of January, 1871, and about the end of each three months during the term of one whole year, while he was still in office as Secretary of War, unlawfully received from said Marsh like sums in consideration of the appointment of Evans, and in consideration of his (Belknaps) permitting (Evans) to continue to maintain said trading establishment at Fort Sill, whereby Wm. W. Belknap, who was then Secretary of War as aforesaid, was guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors in office.

**THE SECOND ARTICLE**

recites that Belknap, while Secretary of War, on the 4th of November, 1873, willfully, corruptly and unlawfully received from Marsh \$1,500 in consideration that he would continue to permit Evans to maintain the trading establishment at Fort Sill, and that he improperly permitted Evans to continue to maintain the trading establishment at said military post, and Belknap was thereby guilty while he was Secretary of War, of high misdemeanors in his office.

**THE THIRD ARTICLE**

recites that Belknap, as Secretary of War, appointed Evans to maintain the trading establishment at Fort Sill and Evans, by virtue of such appointment, had since, until the 2d day of March, 1876, maintained that trading establishment and had before he was appointed, and in order to procure such appointment and be continued therein, agreed with Marsh that in consideration of Belknap's appointing him (Evans) to maintain the trading establishment at the instance and request of Marsh, he (Evans) would pay to Marsh a large sum of money

**QUARTERLY IN ADVANCE**

from the date of his appointment, to wit: Twelve thousand dollars during the year and other large sums quarterly during each year in order that Evans should be permitted by Belknap to maintain such trading establishment; that Evans did pay to Marsh such sums of money quarterly during each year until December, 1875; that Marsh upon receipt of each payment paid half thereof to Belknap, and Belknap.

\*The federal government granted the right to trade with Native American tribes.

WHILE KNOWING THESE FACTS and having power to remove Evans from the position at any time, criminally disregarding his duty as Secretary of War, basely prostituting his high office to his lust for private gain, did unlawfully and corruptly continue Evans in the position and permit him to maintain his establishment to the great injury and damage of officers and soldiers at the post and to emigrants and other citizens.

This was against public policy and a great disgrace and detriment of the public service, whereby Belknap was, as Secretary of War, guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors in office.

THE FOURTH ARTICLE charges Belknap with having received from Marsh large sums of money in consideration of his having appointed Evans to maintain the trading establishment at Fort Sill, and in consideration of his continuing him therein, whereby he (Belknap) had been guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors in office.

This article is accompanied by seventeen specifications setting out the times and circumstances of payment.

THE FIFTH ARTICLE, after reciting some general facts, charges that Belknap was induced to make the appointment of Evans by the influence and request of Marsh and, that Evans paid Marsh in consideration of such influence and request divers large sums of money at various times, amounting to about \$12,000 a year from date of appointment to the 25th of March, 1872, and \$5,000 a year thereafter until the 2d March, 1876, all of

WHICH FACTS BELKNAP WELL KNEW, yet corruptly received from said Marsh, either for his own use or to be paid to his (Belknap's) wife divers large sums of money at various times, setting out dates and amounts, all of which acts and doings were while said Belknap was Secretary of War of the United States, and were high misdemeanors in office.

THE DOCUMENT CONCLUDES:  
And the House of Representatives, by the protestation of saying to themselves the liberity of exhibiting at any time thereafter any further article of accusation or impeachment against Wm. W. Belknap, late Secretary of War of the United States, and also of replying to his answers which he shall make unto the articles herein prepared against him, and of offering proof to the same and every part thereof, and to all and every other article, accusation or impeachment which shall be exhibited by them as the case shall require, do demand that said Wm. W. Belknap may be put to answer for the high crimes and misdemeanors in office herein charged against him, and that such proceedings, examinations, trials and judgments may be thereupon had and given as may be  
AGREABLE TO LAW AND JUSTICE.  
The committee also reports the following resolution:  
"Resolved, That seven managers be appointed by ballot to conduct the impeachment exhibited against Wm. W. Belknap, late Secretary of War of the United States."

The Sioux City Daily Journal; March 31, 1876

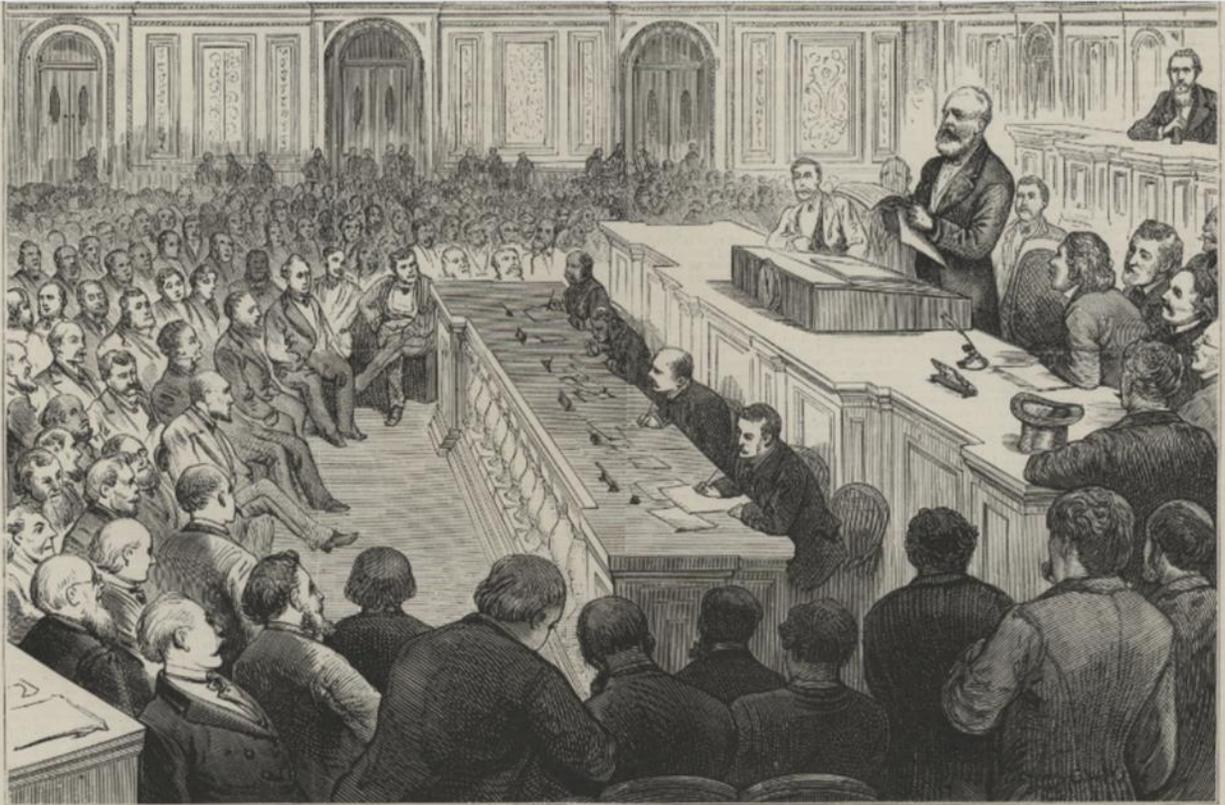
From the House floor, Clymer moved for Belknap to be impeached. However, Belknap had submitted his resignation to Grant prior to Clymer's call for impeachment, and this would be Belknap's defense. He could not be impeached because he was no longer secretary of war.

Excerpts from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*

MARCH 18, 1876.]

FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER.

25



WASHINGTON, D. C.—HON. HENRY CLYMER, CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXPENDITURES IN THE WAR DEPARTMENT, READING TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES THE REPORT AND RESOLUTIONS ASKING FOR THE IMPEACHMENT OF W. W. BELANAP, LATE SECRETARY OF WAR.



WASHINGTON, D. C.—INTERVIEW, AT THE WHITE HOUSE, BETWEEN PRESIDENT GRANT AND SECRETARY BELANAP.

**DAILY DEMOCRAT.**

**BELKNAP.**

The Last of the Impeachment Trial.

**The Accused Acquitted on All Counts.**

WASHINGTON, Aug. 1.—Belknap has been acquitted, the vote standing 35 for conviction to 25 for not guilty—less than the required two-thirds.

LATER.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 1.—At noon the Senate began to vote upon the articles of impeachment of Wm. W. Belknap.

Upon the first article of impeachment 35 Senators voted guilty, 25 not guilty, for want of jurisdiction.

Those who voted guilty were Bayard, Booth, Cameron, of Pa., Cockerell, Cooper, Davis, Dawes, Dennis, Edmunds, Gordon, Hamilton, Harvey, Hitchcock, Kelly, Kernan, Key, McCrery, McDonald, Merrimon, Mitchell, Morrill, Norwood, Oglesby, Randolph, Ransom, Robertson, Sargent, Saulsbury, Sherman, Stevenson, Thurman, Wadleigh, Wallace, White and Withers.

Those voting in the negative were Anthony, Boutwell, Bruce, Cameron, of Wis., Allison, Christlancy, Conkling, Conover, Cragin, Dorsey, Eaton, Ferry, Frelinghuysen, Hamlin, Howe, Ingalls, Jones, of Nev., Logan, McMullen, Paddock, Patterson, Spencer, West, Windom and Wright.

Jones, of Florida, declined to vote on the ground that the Senate had no jurisdiction.

The presiding officer announced that thirty had not voted guilty, and therefore the defendant was acquitted of the charge on the first article.

On the second article 36 Senators voted guilty and 25 not guilty.

Marcy who did not answer on the first roll call, voted guilty upon the second article.

Those Senators who voted not guilty, repeated their reason for doing so, being want of jurisdiction.

Upon the third and fourth articles the vote stood as above, 36 voting guilty and 25 not guilty.

Before the roll call on the 5th article was finished, Morton, who had been detained on account of a severe fall this morning, came in and voted guilty, making a vote on that article of 37 guilty and 25 not guilty.

Two-thirds of the Senate not having voted in favor of sustaining the articles of impeachment, it was ordered that the judgment of acquittal be entered, and the Senate, sitting as a court of impeachment, adjourned *sine die*.

The House did impeach Belknap, but the Senate lacked the votes to convict. Iowa's two Senators at the time, George G. Wright and William B. Allison, voted against impeachment.

Belknap never fell out of favor with his Civil War contemporaries. In his portrait, his Grand Army of the Republic medal shows prominently on his lapel.

There are numerous articles written about Belknap, but some do not include the story of his impeachment.



**This funerary monument to Belknap is in Arlington National Cemetery. Belknap's monument was built by Carl Rohl-Smith, a Danish sculptor who also is responsible for the 9 bronze statues on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on the south lawn of the Iowa State Capitol.**

*Quad City Times; August 1, 1876*