

CAREER OF JOHN P. ALTGELD.

Born in Germany, Came to America as Boy, and Rose to Governorship by His Own Efforts.

John Peter Altgeld was born in Felters, near Cologne, Germany, on Dec. 30, 1847. His parents came to this country while he was a boy of 8 years. The next known of him is that he was a farm boy in Richland County, O., where his father located. Schools were few and far between in those days in Ohio, and farm boys had fewer opportunities for attending such as there were. Hence the elementary education of Mr. Altgeld was limited.

The war made a break in the monotony of his life. He enlisted in 1864; he was only 16 years old at the time. He was a soldier in what is known as the James River campaign. His experiences in the army are not recounted by the historian. He seldom referred to them himself. So little had he to say about them that it was a matter of surprise to many that he had ever been a soldier until the campaign of 1862, in which he was a candidate, was well nigh over.

Starts West on Foot.

After the war he started out for himself. He taught school for awhile, although he had had no opportunities of adding much to his own education. In 1869 he started West on foot. He walked from Ohio to what is now East St. Louis. In doing so he passed over southern Illinois.

When he reached the east bank of the Mississippi River opposite St. Louis he had 15 cents in his pocket. He met a young man who did not have a cent. The fare across the river was five cents. Young Altgeld paid the fare for both and they reached St. Louis with a balance of five cents, which Altgeld invested in writing paper, ink, and envelopes, and wrote home.

He obtained work in St. Louis and saved enough to help him on to southern Kansas. After his arrival there he was taken sick, and for some time he lay among strangers. After his recovery he moved to Savannah in northwest Missouri, where he taught school, studied law, and soon after was elected City Attorney and later on the Prosecuting Attorney of the county. This happened within five years.

Came to Chicago in 1875.

Altgeld came to Chicago in 1875, a stranger. In less than a year he had a practice which enabled him to be comparatively independent. He made some friends. He formed a partnership with his nephew, Lanehart, who was his confidential man to the end. Lanehart suggested politics to Altgeld. The two men had operated together in real estate and a rapid rise in the price of Lake View soil put them on the road to wealth. In 1877 he married Miss Ford of Richland County, Ohio.

In 1884 the Democracy of the North Side, the Fourth District, wanted a candidate to defeat Congressman Adams. The fact that Altgeld was a German, a man of wealth, one of political ambition, one of more than

ordinary intellectual attainment, singled him out as a candidate. He got the nomination, and, although he reduced the Republican majority in the district, he was defeated.

In 1880 he was nominated for the office of Judge of the Superior Court and was elected. He served until July 2, 1891, when he resigned. In the discharge of his duties as Judge he was selected by the bench as its Chief Justice, which is more of a mark of esteem than anything else.

Strong Writer and Talker.

While he was on the bench and after he left it Judge Altgeld showed a fondness for literature and contributed several papers to the North American Review and other publications. His articles were forcibly written and attracted attention. As a public speaker he was terse, earnest, and logical.

He was a man of few words and his expressions struck the listener as having been weighed before given out. He was of melancholy temperament, but never exhibited this tendency except by a sad expression.

Is Elected Governor.

In 1892 Mr. Altgeld accepted the Democratic nomination for Governor, and, knowing that to carry the always Republican State of Illinois there would have to be a strenuous effort made and a different course of tactics pursued, immediately after accepting the nomination he started out through the State on a "still hunt," and visited every town of any importance, meeting the people and talking with them personally, and the success of his operations was fully proven in the November election, he being the first Democratic Governor elected since 1836; and no little credit is due him for the success of the entire Democratic State ticket.

As soon as his election was assured he went to Hot Springs, Ark., where he remained endeavoring to recuperate his health until within a few weeks of the inauguration.

Altgeld had promised, if not individually, through his managers and the Democratic press of the State, that if elected he would make a clean sweep of Republicans in office, and he undertook to do this from the hour he became Governor. He was extremely ill in Chicago, prostrated by overwork, just before the inauguration.

Altgeld himself thought he would die. He never entirely regained his health after that attack.

He was too ill to get up, but insisted on going to Springfield for the inauguration and took the oath of office when he should have been in bed.

Made Wholesale Discharges.

Altgeld began with sweeping discharges of Republican officeholders, and turned the State offices over to his Democratic allies. He acted with determination in everything, following his own ideas and listening but little to advice of Democratic leaders in regard to his conduct in office.

Probably his most distinguishing acts during his term as Governor were the pardon of the Anarchists convicted of complicity in the Haymarket riots, his trouble with Grover Cleveland over the sending of federal troops into Chicago to quell riots, and his wholesale pardons of convicts. He did these things seemingly without regard to the effect they would have on his own political aspirations. His friends claim he believed everything he did during that time to be right, and they commend him for his political courage in committing what he knew to be political suicide.

Takes Up Several Hobbies.

It was late in his term of office that he began to be known throughout the nation as the expounder of national doctrines. His principal "hobby" along the lines of reform was his opposition to "government by injunction."

Naturally he made enemies not only politically, but within his own party. He was nominated for Governor in 1896. It was Presidential year. He had swallowed the free silver platform of Bryan without a protest, although even his best friends admitted he never fully espoused the free silver doctrine. He accepted it, they said, in order that he might get his own plank against "government by injunction" put into the Democratic platform.

Makes Campaign While Ill.

During that campaign Governor Altgeld was ill, so ill that his physicians declared that to attempt an active campaign would be to court death. He was made the special target of opposition stump speakers. His opponent, John R. Tanner, with a party of national speakers, toured Illinois. Governor Altgeld, although told that his heart might fail at any moment if he undertook to speak, secured a train and followed the Tanner party through southern Illinois, making twelve to fifteen speeches a day in the towns where the other party had appeared, replying to their arguments.

He was so sick he remained in bed in the car between stations, raising himself from bed by sheer will power to deliver another speech a short time later.

Makes a Famous Speech.

At the end of that desperate ten days' campaign he went from East St. Louis, where he spoke last, to New York and delivered what was perhaps the most famous speech he ever made in Cooper Union, New York, explaining to the East his "government by injunction" plank.

He collapsed after that speech. Beaten overwhelmingly in that campaign, he returned to his practice of law in Chicago, living quietly and trying to recuperate his health, which continued bad.

His enmity to Mayor Harrison, which was bitter for several years, brought him actively into politics in 1899, when he ran independently against Harrison for Mayor after being defeated for the nomination. He was opposed by John M. Harlan on the Republican ticket.

About a year ago Mr. Altgeld formed a law partnership with Clarence Darrow and W. H. Thompson.

The firm name has been Altgeld, Darrow & Thompson.