

Lawyer, Campaigner & Candid Campaign Lawyer (1928 & 1932)

*John Q. Barrett**

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In 1880, Mr. Velona Walter Haughwout of Fall River, Massachusetts, married Helen J. Preston in her hometown, Jamestown, New York. They settled in Fall River but retained ties, through her family, to Jamestown.

Decades later, Mr. Haughwout read Jamestown newspaper stories—some and maybe all sent by his sister-in-law, who continued to reside there—about the activities, including public speeches, of a Jamestown attorney, Robert Houghwout Jackson. Perhaps Haughwout and Jackson had met. They definitely were connected by Jackson’s middle name, which was his mother’s maiden name (except she seemed to spell it Houghwot). Velona Haughwout concluded, it seems correctly, that he and attorney Robert Jackson were related descendants of an early Dutch settler in New Netherlands (North America, and later the United States).

In June 1928, Mr. Haughwout wrote his compliments to Jackson:

My Dear Cousin:

I read with great profit and inflated sense of pleasure your screed upon Russia.

My inflation was due to the astonishment that our family name was sustained by a man of real consequence. I had supposed Haughwoutian oratory to be an extinct art. I salute you sir and am proud to subscribe myself your kinsman.

V.W. Haughwout¹

* Professor of Law, St. John’s University School of Law, New York City, and Elizabeth S. Lenna Fellow, Robert H. Jackson Center, Jamestown, New York (www.roberthjackson.org). I emailed an earlier version of this essay to the Jackson List on October 24, 2014.

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¹ Letter from V.W. Haughwout to Robert H. Jackson, Esq., June 11, 1928, in Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. (“RHJL”), Box 16, Folder 2. An image of this letter is at the end of this file.

That Fall, Haughwout wrote again to Jackson. Haughwout's sister-in-law had sent him a story on a recent Jackson speech supporting the Democratic Party's nominee for president, New York Governor Al Smith. "[W]hile I cannot subscribe to your conclusion that Smith should be elevated to the White House," Haughwout wrote,

I must say that the speech was by far the most satisfying one I have read during this filthy campaign, barring none. It is so superior that I am passing it on to a prominent Boston friend of mine as a specimen of fearless, lucid reasoning. I hope it does not carry him over into the Smith column, but I am for frankness whatever the result. . . . It would clarify the air if both candidates [Al Smith and Republican nominee Herbert Hoover] were to imitate your candor.²

Jackson dictated and sent a letter back to Haughwout. Jackson expressed some agreement about the Smith-Hoover race and then mentioned the candidacy that he found more promising:

I appreciate very much your kind words about my speech but I really think that it only shines by reason of the dismal campaign background which is the worst in my recollection. We have, however, in Franklin D. Roosevelt, a splendid candidate for Governor of New York whom I hope to see elected.³

* * *

Robert Jackson met Franklin Roosevelt in 1911 and then had episodic contacts with him over the next seventeen years. Roosevelt was elected Governor of New York in 1928, and thereafter, and even more so after his reelection in 1930, Jackson was in contact with him and involved in state policymaking and politics.⁴

² Letter from V.W. Haughwout to Robert H. Jackson, Esq., Oct. 22, 1928, *in* RHJL, Box 1, Folder 13.

³ Letter from Robert H. Jackson to V.W. Haughwout, Oct. 24, 1928 (unsigned carbon copy of typed letter, *in id.*)

⁴ See generally ROBERT H. JACKSON, THAT MAN: AN INSIDER'S PORTRAIT OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT (John Q. Barrett, ed., 2003).

In 1932, the Democratic Party nominated F.D.R. to be its presidential candidate. Jackson became a prominent campaign lawyer and spokesman.

On October 24, 1932, James A. Farley of New York, the Democratic Party's national chairman, held a press conference at his headquarters, the Biltmore Hotel in Manhattan. Farley announced that he was forming a state-wide lawyers committee to protect Democratic Party interests before the election and at the polls. The committee's first task, he said, would be to investigate the reported Republican campaign to intimidate workers from voting Democratic. Farley announced that Robert H. Jackson of Jamestown had agreed to chair this committee, and that Jackson would appoint chairmen of district committees to assist him.⁵

Jackson worked quickly. Two days later, he announced that he had appointed Democratic lawyers' committee representatives in judicial districts and counties across New York State, and that they were investigating dozens of complaints of factory owners and managers attempting to intimidate workers into not voting Democratic.⁶

Late the next week, Jackson reported back to Farley, and publicly, on his investigation of alleged employer intimidation of prospective voters. Jackson and his committee members had found that: (1) only a small proportion of employers had used such methods; (2) the similarity of their methods and "advice" to workers indicated a common origin; (3) such efforts "boomerang," causing more resentment than intimidation; and (4) federal and state legislation should be enacted to punish "every such attempt."⁷

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On the following Tuesday, November 8th, Governor Roosevelt defeated President Hoover. In New York State's race for governor, Lieutenant Governor Herbert Lehman defeated the Republican candidate, attorney William J. Donovan.

Through the following year, Robert Jackson continued to practice law in Jamestown, and to assist the Democratic Party and its candidates.

⁵ See *Farley Finds West Unmoved By Hoover*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 25, 1932, at 11.

⁶ See *Sees Governor Victor By 1,000,000 in State*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 27, 1932, at 12.

⁷ See *Green Repudiates Appeal for Tariff*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 4, 1932, at 11.

