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Candidates have Russell to thank

Small town experiences may pay off for Dole and Specter

By DAVID M. SHRIBMAN
The Boston Globe

RUSSELL — People around here remember the young Bob Dole as the witty soda jerk over at Dawson's Drugstore — and later as the angular athlete cut down in war only to fight his way back, first struggling to walk and then running for office.

They remember the young Arlen Specter as a champion debater who worked in his father's junkyard, whose home served as a synagogue for the Jewish aviators at nearby Walker Air Base and who later won fame as a Philadelphia prosecutor and Pennsylvania senator.

Welcome to Russell, a rural outpost of 4,800 that — in an improbable juxtaposition of chance and ambition — is home to two Republican candidates for the White House.

"It isn't something in the water," said Russell Townsley, the cerebral, retired publisher of the Russell Daily News and Russell Record.

Nor did Russell have the bright lights of Wichita, or even of Salina. "We did small-town things," said Velma Beeman, a classmate of Specter's. "We walked to the movies, walked to the dances. We provided our own entertainment: hiking, ice skating. There always seemed to be a group that was together."



Bob Dole



Arlen Specter

Founded 123 years ago as a junction on the Kansas Pacific Railroad, Russell is the sort of rural community celebrated in American folklore.

It is a place where the newspaper used to accept chickens as payment for a subscription, where the black clouds that rolled into town in the Depression years brought dust, never rain, and where today the fields on the outskirts of town are planted with wheat — and with oil pumps.

But the town spawned an unusual record of achievers. Besides Specter and Dole, who represents Kansas in the Senate, there were Roland Rautenstrauss, a football teammate of Dole's who later became president of the University of Colorado; Marge Dusay, a movie

star who played opposite Gregory Peck; and Steve Mills, a movie and television producer who oversaw such productions as "Lonesome Dove."

"In Russell," Mills said from Hollywood, "you watch haircuts on Saturday afternoon and you drag Main Street at night."

Dole's father was a popular figure, running the White Front Cafe, taking over a cream and egg station and finally managing a grain elevator. Specter's father, who sold cantaloupes before opening a junkyard, moved the family here in the autumn of 1942. Arlen was 12.

"I learned to play pool there, and the next year I joined the debating team," Specter said. "You couldn't do both."

All of this probably makes Alice Mills the only woman in history ever to teach high school algebra to two contenders for the same presidential nomination.

She remembers Dole as "quiet, very quiet, and well-mannered" and remembers Specter as "very brilliant, very industrious." Today the two — relentless achievers but different in temperament — make for unusual prairie home companions.

Though Dole, 71, retains the dust of the Kansas prairie in his voice and Specter, 65, is the very model of the modern urban lawmaker, Russell is the backdrop not only for their memories but for their formative experiences.

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Russell's history led to success of two senators

"If Frank Capra were creating this story, he'd invent Russell," said Richard Norton Smith, a former Dole speechwriter who now is director of the Ronald Reagan Library in California. "It is a small town with big people, a place on the prairie where people tested themselves against the elements, and where people without a lot became pretty self-reliant."

Indeed, it is the small towns of America and not its big cities that have produced most of the nation's presidents. The Independence of Harry Truman, the Abilene of Dwight Eisenhower, the Plains of Jimmy Carter, the Dixon of Ronald Reagan and the Hope of Bill Clinton — all small towns, all instrumental in the shaping of presidents, all similar in an important way to Russell.

"Out there, people do develop a sense of values," says former Gov. Mike Hayden, himself from the western Kansas town of Atwood. "There are so few people, you have to learn to depend on each other."

It was the discovery of oil on Thanksgiving Day 1923 that changed the fortunes of Russell, giving it a thin measure of prosperity when other communities suffered in the Great Depression and — important in the lives of both Dole and Specter — permitting the town to outbid, sometimes by \$10 a month, nearby towns for the services of gifted teachers.

"The teachers demanded that we do our best," said Dean Banker, who until his retirement ran the family's 113-year-old clothing store where both senators were outfitted. "You didn't dare shirk."

Besides Charlotte O'Brien, the

mayor's wife, the Specters were the only Jewish people in Russell. When his sister came of marriageable age in the late 1940s, the Specters grew worried that the only Jewish boy in town was Arlen himself. They moved east, as Specter would later put it in a poignant tribute to his family on the Senate floor, so as "to provide the opportunity for Shirley to meet and marry Edwin Kety."

But Specter returns often. His aunt, Joyce Specter, said he is fond "of his memories and the places where he grew up." Dole still owns the family home at 1035 North Maple, where an American flag flies outside.

For years the people here have regarded the presence of two of its sons in the Senate as a curiosity. Monday's paper has separate page-one stories on Dole's budget ideas and Specter's flat-tax proposal.

But now presidential politics has made rivals of two men whose families have known each other for more than half a century.

"We all like Arlen," said Norma Jean Steele, Dole's younger sister. "But we like Bob better."

That's a matter of some awkwardness in a town that has "Bob Dole Country" painted on a grain elevator and on a highway sign.

"We have to be real careful when we are in a group," said Margaret "Barney" Roberts, a longtime friend of Dole's. "We just don't talk about politics."

Joyce Specter is well-liked in town. Just the other night, G.B. Dawson, probably Dole's best friend in town, went out to dinner with his wife and, as they've been doing for years, with Joyce Specter.

"We're not going to let this hurt anyone," said Gloria Dole Nelson, the oldest sister of the Senate majority leader.

Hutchinson News Monday, March 20, 1995

A front-runner's campaign

Dole

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WASHINGTON — Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole, R-Kan., is putting together a classic front-runner's campaign for president and is hoping the only similarity between his failed campaign of 1988 and his 1996 bid will be the sign on the headquarters door.

From his standing in the polls and his stature in the party to the staff he is building and the strategy he is pursuing, Dole is assembling a campaign that has far

Dole borrowing Bush strategies

more in common with George Bush's 1988 effort than his. As one veteran of the Bush campaign put it, "They've taken our playbook."

Like Bush, Dole is using his lead in the polls to attract endorsements and talent, all designed to create an aura of inevitability about his candidacy in

a party that has been friendly to front-runners.

Like Bush, Dole is building firewalls in key primary states such as New York, Ohio and South Carolina to protect against an unexpected stumble in Iowa or New Hampshire.

Like Bush, Dole has discovered the importance of support from

Republican governors, who generally have effective political networks, and is far ahead of his rivals in winning their support.

Like Bush, Dole is counting on a less-than-unified conservative wing of the party and is trying to prevent conservative Republicans from coalescing around Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas.

Dole is aggressively positioning himself on the right on issues such as affirmative action, guns and shrinking the federal government to prevent rivals from gaining the upper hand on hot-button issues to GOP primary voters. But unlike Bush, who as vice president did not have the freedom to strike out on his own, Dole can maneuver as he pleases on these issues.

All this has brought a different See DOLE, Page 3

atmosphere to this Dole campaign. "It feels so much better than eight years ago," said William Lacy, Dole's deputy campaign chairman, "when every time you stepped up to the plate you had to hit a home run."

The one apparent weakness of Dole's candidacy is the message. Talk of "dusting off the 10th Amendment" and "reining in government" are no substitute, some supporters say, for a compelling vision that can satisfy Republican voters who want to advance the political revolution they started last November.

The flaw in Dole's strategy, said Charles Black, a top adviser to Gramm, is that "most activists, people who give money or time in Republican primaries, are interested in issues, and they want to know what your message is. The political argument (about inevitability) is fine, but that's not all they want to hear."

But Lacy and campaign manager Scott Reed predicted Dole would begin to put those concerns to rest when he formally launches his candidacy April 10.

The most significant difference between 1996 and 1988 is Dole's standing in the party — and how that has affected his demeanor as

a candidate. By his admission he is more relaxed, more comfortable with himself and, after two losing campaigns for president, more prepared for what lies ahead.

"There's a difference in attitude on his part," said David Keene, one of his top advisers in 1988 and a supporter today.

Dole also appears driven to correct the mistakes of 1988. After winning the Iowa caucuses in 1988, he lost to Bush in New Hampshire, then turned to the round of Southern primaries and found himself checkmated.

This year he has moved to prevent history from repeating.

OUTLOOK

Revolutions aren't made for moderates

Let the record show that no one is suggesting that Newt Gingrich is Robespierre, or even Robespierre with a laptop. But then it is Gingrich himself who described the Republican tide as a "revolution," and that implies certain precedents. Revolutionaries usually start by killing the king and wind up killing each other. It takes zealots to lead the storm of the fortress, but the mass of men who follow the charge are usually not zealots at all, just moderate people provoked beyond tolerance. After the dust settles, it takes moderation and tolerance to keep them in the fold. That, or the guillotine.

The GOP guillotine malfunctioned last week, but not for want of recent use. Mark Hatfield, the lone Republican senator to vote against the balanced-budget amendment — sending it to defeat — escaped being "disciplined" for his apostasy when several young Republican senators tried and failed to strip him of his chairmanship of the Appropriations Committee.

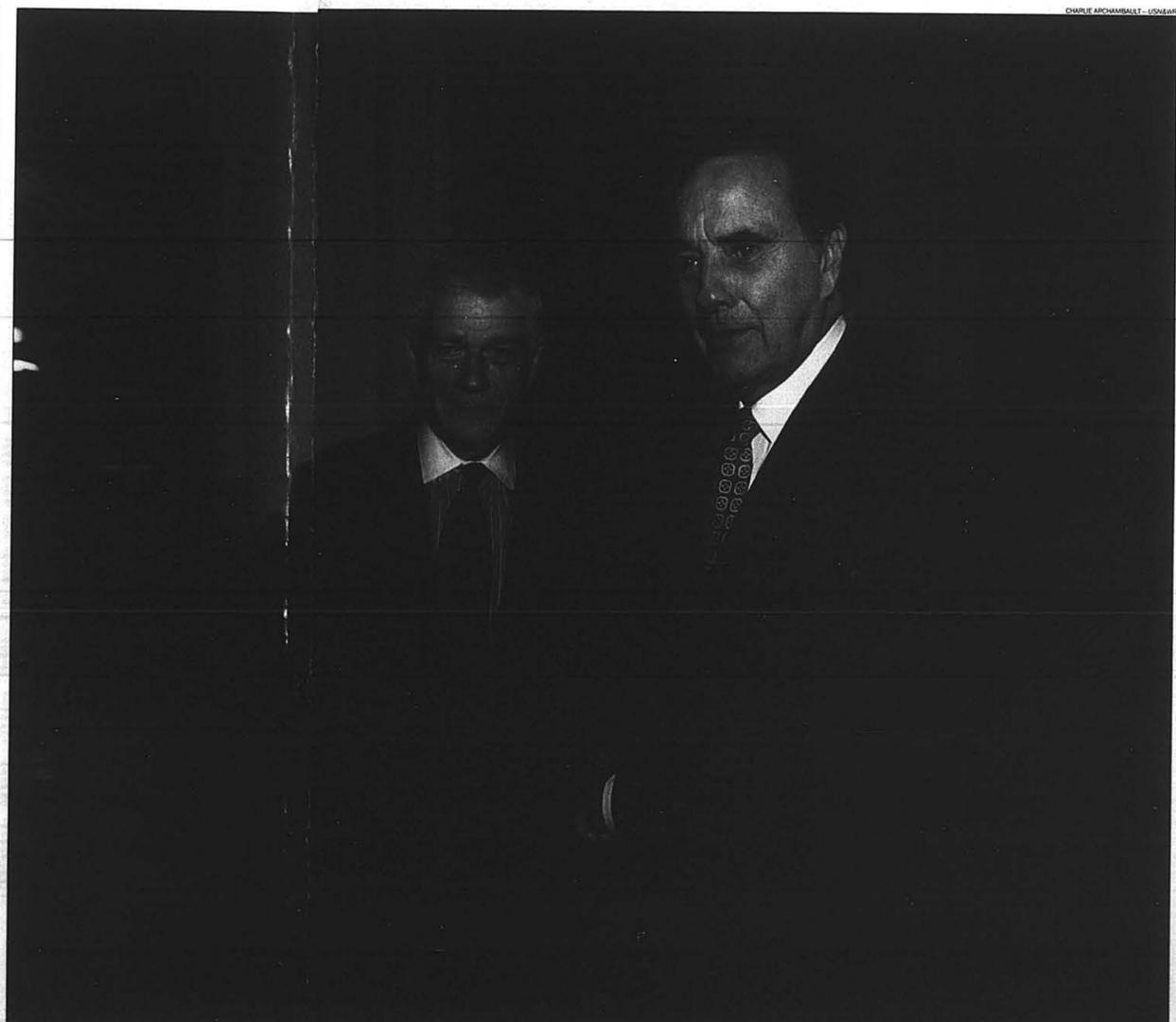
In Gingrich's House, however, backsliders are dealt with more summarily. When Democrat Carrie Meek questioned the speaker's \$4.5 million book deal on the House floor in January, a straight party-line vote struck her remarks from the record. One Republican, Peter Torkildsen of Massachusetts, had disapproved of striking her words.

"Members have spoken their minds for 200 years, and you're not going to stop that," he said, just before he voted the party line. Perhaps recognizing that the mass movement that swept them into power is not prepared to stomach their more zealous aims, a number of intellectual leaders of the revolution have explicitly advocated stern discipline against members who might be tempted to stray out of line. "Remember, we have a whole lot of backslapping nice guys in our caucus who've never been on the firing line," notes Mike Murphy, a GOP media consultant who advised Oliver North and Christine Todd Whitman and now works for Lamar Alexander. Discussing post-revolution strategy in *Harper's*, Murphy says the key is to keep Congress's new Republicans from yielding to pressure from the softhearted people who elected them: "It's the natural way of politicians to be scared to do radical things. We have to whip our guys up into a warriorlike frenzy, or they're going to back off on Day 14."

In the same article, Republican David Frum, who hailed the conservative tide in a book entitled *Dead Right*, elaborates on the problem: It's not just Democrats but a lot of Republicans who favor things like school lunches and public television. "The sort of people who love opera and support their local arts organizations are also the sort of people who make \$100,000 donations to the Republican Party," he says. "We're not going to be fighting with uneducated, destitute people; we're going to be fighting with the most powerful people in American society."

A daunting task, no doubt. Even Robespierre might have had trouble maintaining revolutionary discipline if he had known he would be subject to a recall vote in two years. □ BY STEPHEN BUDIANSKY

The challenge is to keep new members from yielding to pressure from the softhearted people who elected them.



Reprimed, Hatfield, with support from Senate

Majority Leader Bob Dole, weathered a GOP attempt to strip him of his chairmanship for opposing the balanced-budget amendment.