Getting to the Source: William Jennings Bryan

"Getting to the Source" brochures supplement various exhibits produced by History Nebraska. They are intended to lead researchers to original documents in the Library/Archives that staff used in developing the exhibit text. These materials, and many more fascinating documents, are available for use in the public reading rooms of History Nebraska at 1500 "R" Street in Lincoln. The staff there will be happy to help you get to the source.

The William Jennings Bryan manuscript collection (RG3198).
Though not the main collection of Bryan's papers, which are at the Library of Congress, this collection contains letters, speeches, scrapbooks, and printed material relating to The Great Commoner.

The William Jennings Bryan photograph collection (B915).
Nearly 800 images reflect Bryan's life from his Illinois boyhood in the 1860s through his death following the Scopes trial in 1925.

The William Frederick Schwind manuscript collection (RG2524).
Schwind was once Bryan's private secretary and the families remained close personal friends. The collection contains correspondence between the Bryans, the Schwinds, and their children.

The S.J. Bole manuscript collection (RG0737).
The collection consists of letters from William Jennings Bryan to S. James Bole, professor at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois. The letters date from 1922-1925. Bryan tries to enlist Bole's help in attacking the theory of evolution, and in 1925, asks if Bole would appear as a witness at the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee.

The Seymour Smith manuscript collection (RG5659).
Smith was an admirer and supporter of William Jennings Bryan who later gave public lectures on the life and legacy of William Jennings Bryan. The collection contains letters, speeches, publications, clippings, etc. by and about William Jennings Bryan.

The Harry F. Huntington manuscript collection (RG1101).
The collection consists of a booklength manuscript written by Harry F. Huntington of Longmont, Colorado. The manuscript is entitled, "William Jennings Bryan, the Man I Knew," and was written by Huntington sometime around 1955. A minister and friend of William Jennings Bryan, Huntington writes about Bryan's ancestors; his childhood life in Salem, Illinois; his education; his career as a lawyer in Lincoln, Nebraska; his political life and causes; and his religious life. Huntington gives his observations of Bryan as well as other people's impressions.

The Commoner, 1901-23 (305, C73).
Bryan's weekly (later monthly) newspaper, published in Lincoln, includes most of his speeches and reveals his ideas on political, social, and economic issues. The paper has been microfilmed by History Nebraska.
Nebraska History (978.2, H62m).
History Nebraska's quarterly magazine has published more than thirty scholarly articles since 1950 on different aspects of Bryan's career. They can be located by consulting the cumulative index to the quarterly.

An interview with William Jennings Bryan, Jr. (AV1.012.05).
The Great Commoner's son recalls his father's speaking ability. Also on tape are excerpts from several of Bryan's famous speeches (AV1.051.33).

The Paolo Enrico Coletta manuscript collection (RG1869).
Coletta was an authority on the life and career of William Jennings Bryan. This collection consists of four manuscripts for publication on various topics related to Coletta's research on William Jennings Bryan.

The Bryan Memorial Commission manuscript collection (RG3544).
Records of a commission established in 1941 to raise funds for a statute of William Jennings Bryan, which now stands in front of Bryan's home, Fairview, in Lincoln.

The Society's library includes numerous books by and about William Jennings Bryan.
They can be located by consulting the library card catalog. Several of the more important ones are: The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan by Himself and his Wife, Mary Baird Bryan (1925); Paolo A. Coletta's three-volume biography (1964-69), the most thorough treatment of Bryan's life, published under the titles Political Evangelist, 1860-1908; Progressive Politician and Moral Statesman, 1909-1915; and Political Puritan, 1915-1925; an excellent, short biography by Robert W. Cherny, A Righteous Cause: The Life of William Jennings Bryan (1985); and Willa Cather's contemporary account, "The Personal Side of William Jennings Bryan," originally published in 1900 and reprinted in Prairie Schooner 23 (Winter 1949).