Nebraska and the Presidential Election of 1912

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Full Citation: David F Danker, “Nebraska and the Presidential Election of 1912,” Nebraska History 37 (1956): 283-309

Article Summary: Major candidates campaigned vigorously in Nebraska in 1912. The state Republican party split, and Nebraska’s electoral votes went to Woodrow Wilson, considered the progressive candidate.

Cataloging Information:


Place Names: Chicago, Illinois; Baltimore, Maryland

Keywords: William Jennings Bryan, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, William Howard Taft, Bull Moose party, Progressives

Photographs / Images: Guy R Spencer cartoon depicting the dilemma of Nebraska Republican candidates in 1912 (Omaha Morning World-Herald, June 26, 1912); cartoon showing Nebraska welcoming Woodrow Wilson in the 1912 campaign (Omaha Morning World-Herald, October 5, 1912); Wilson and William Jennings Bryan with Bryan’s grandson, John, on the steps of Fairview, Bryan’s Lincoln home, October 7, 1912

Maps: election results by counties, 1908 and 1912
THE presidential election of 1912 was of particular interest to Nebraskans. This interest stemmed not only from the vigorous campaigns of the three major candidates but also from the considerable roles that Nebraskans played in the election. The state was not unused to the political spotlight, having provided the Democratic candidate in three of the four previous campaigns and having been a major center of the Populist movement of the 1890’s. William Jennings Bryan still commanded attention in 1912, and men of both major parties, styling themselves as progressives, preached doctrines similar in tone and spirit to the Populist’s Omaha platform of 1892.

Nebraska Republicans of progressive leanings did not wish to see William Howard Taft renominated for the presidency. They subscribed to the widespread belief that the President had not followed the progressive course charted by the popular Theodore Roosevelt. As Taft’s popularity ebbed with his support of the Payne-Aldrich Tariff and the dismissal from the Forest Service of Gifford Pinchot, conservationist and close friend of Theodore Roosevelt, the progressives began to take action.

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In Washington, during the early months of 1910, Representative George W. Norris of McCook was a ranking member of the insurgents who rebelled against the established control of the regulars in the Republican party and provided leadership in the fight to strip the Speaker of the House, Joseph Cannon, of his power to dominate the affairs of the House.¹ In Lincoln, Frank A. Harrison, the unrestrained editor of The Nebraska State Capital, printed headlines which demonstrated the increasing insurgent movement and announced that “Political unrest and realization of Treachery at Washington cause Republicans of Nebraska to organize.”² He went on to report a meeting in Lincoln on January 10, 1910, in the office of C. C. Flansburg,³ at which a resolution was adopted to support the insurgents in Congress and to lay the groundwork for a more general meeting. This meeting took place on January 20, with the Lincoln mayor, Don L. Love, acting as chairman. Harrison reported that the meeting was typical of the sentiment that had spread all over the western states. “There was no threatened bolt out of the Republican party but there was a warning that the party was in danger because of the standpat leadership in Congress.”⁴

The months following this meeting saw the progressive movement gather strength nationally and locally. Attention in November 1910 was focused on Nebraska’s Fifth Congressional District where Norris was running for re-election. Senator Robert LaFollette had stated, “Progressive republicanism everywhere demands the re-election of Nebraska’s great progressive leader George W. Norris.”⁵ Progressive Republicans took heart at Norris’ four thousand vote majority over R. D. Sutherland, his Democratic opponent.

² The Nebraska State Capital (Lincoln), January 15, 1910.
³ Claude C. Flansburg was city attorney of Lincoln. (Lincoln City Directory 1910, p. 206.)
⁴ Nebraska State Capital, January 27, 1910.
⁵ Nebraska State Journal (Lincoln), November 2 and 10, 1910.
The Republican state convention in 1911 was still in the hands of the administration supporters. To the outspoken editor of *The Nebraska State Capital*, this illustrated “what eight hundred postmasters and an equal number of other professional office holders can do when ordered to frame up delegations and policies.” He predicted, however, that the coming primaries would show what the voters can do “when organized through a common feeling of disgust and dissatisfaction with the administration and the methods that are adopted to sustain it.”

George Norris announced that he was going to try for the Senate seat then held by Norris Brown. In announcing his candidacy he went on to state that Taft was not sure of renomination and that the states with early primary elections, of which Nebraska was one, should convince the Republican party, “That the disaster of defeat can only be avoided by preventing the nomination of Taft.” Norris favored Senator LaFollette for the nomination and spoke at the Nebraska State Fair in rebuttal to a speech given the previous day by Taft’s Secretary of Agriculture, James Wilson.

The President himself came to Lincoln a month later and was welcomed by a group which included Governor Chester A. Aldrich and William Jennings Bryan. Bryan drank his health with water and exchanged compliments. Taft was scarcely out of Lincoln before Governor Aldrich declared that he would support LaFollette for the nomination. Aldrich had carefully avoided any statement during Taft’s visit that might be construed as support for the President.

Senator Robert LaFollette was considered the logical progressive to capture the Republican presidential nomination and, during the year 1911, it was to him that Nebraska progressive Republicans, such as Norris and Governor Al-

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*Nebraska State Capital*, July 28, 1911.
*Nebraska State Journal*, September 5, 6, and 7, 1911.
*Nebraska State Capital*, October 6, 1911.
drich, gave their support. A LaFollette-for-President Club, formed in Lincoln on September 22, 1911, elected John McCarthy, former congressman from Ponca, Nebraska, as president. LaFollette’s chances faded, not before the efforts of the Taft forces, but before the rising sentiment for Theodore Roosevelt. The colorful former President had a large personal following which wished to see him lead the progressive movement with which he had identified himself and upon which he had focused attention during his administration. LaFollette mistakenly had assumed that Roosevelt supported his candidacy. The rumors that Roosevelt was not averse to accepting the nomination himself grew, and LaFollette’s friends became disturbed. In Nebraska there was open talk that Roosevelt’s name would appear on the primary ballot. George W. Norris wrote to Roosevelt requesting that he inform the Nebraska secretary of state that he would not allow his name to appear. Roosevelt replied to Norris on January 2, 1912, and the reply was not reassuring to the friends of LaFollette.

Roosevelt sounded somewhat more like a candidate a few weeks later in a letter of reply to a Taft supporter, Franklin A. Shotwell, an Omaha lawyer. Shotwell had written that “some scheming politicians” were seeking to embarrass the Colonel by placing his name on the Nebraska

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11 Nebraska Taft forces formally organized on December 28, 1911. C. E. Adams of Superior was the president, and Victor Rosewater of the *Omaha Bee* was a leading member of the committee. (Claire Mulvey, “Republican Party in Nebraska, 1900-1916” [M. A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1934], p. 133.)
primary ballot and requested permission to notify the Nebraska secretary of state to remove Roosevelt’s name. Roosevelt’s reply of January 24, 1912, left little doubt as to his position:

My dear Mr. Shotwell: I am not yet prepared publicly to make any announcement in the matter, and when I do make such an announcement I will do so on my own initiative and publicly . . . My dear Mr. Shotwell, if it were only the politicians who, as you say, wish to have me put up, the matter would be simple; but I do not believe that this is the case. I think that the movement for me comes neither from my personal friends, nor from my personal enemies, but from the people at large. . . .

If any doubt as to Roosevelt’s position existed in mid-January, 1912, it soon disappeared. A Roosevelt-for-President headquarters was opened in Chicago before the month was out. A meeting of Roosevelt supporters from thirty states, held in Chicago on February 10, 1912, drew up resolutions calling for his candidacy. A letter was drafted to this effect and signed by seven Republican governors: Aldrich of Nebraska, Glasscock of West Virginia, Bass of New Hampshire, Carey of Wyoming, Osborn of Michigan, Stubbs of Kansas, and Hadley of Missouri.

Roosevelt replied that he would accept the nomination if it were tendered to him and remarked at Columbus, Ohio, “My hat is in the ring.” The announcement forced the progressive Republicans of Nebraska to make a choice between supporting LaFollette or Roosevelt. Governor Aldrich, of course, had shifted his support to Roosevelt. Senator Norris continued to support LaFollette, and Frank A. Harrison assumed charge of LaFollette’s Nebraska campaign. Senator Norris Brown, the incumbent and primary election opponent of George Norris, was a Roosevelt man. The Republican state committee favored Taft. All three

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14 Ibid., p. 490.
15 Pringle, op. cit., p. 555.
16 Aldrich spoke in behalf of the progressive cause in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. (Letters, C. C. McLean to Aldrich, Jan. 21, 1912, and Aldrich to McLean, Jan. 24, 1912. Governors’ papers, Nebraska State Historical Society Library.)
17 The Lincoln Daily Star, February 11, 1912.
18 Pringle, op. cit., p. 556.
candidates' names were entered upon the Republican primary ballot, and campaigning began.\textsuperscript{19}

Some measure of Theodore Roosevelt’s popularity is indicated by a poll conducted by the *Nebraska State Journal* during the first fifteen days of February. Readers were asked to indicate, on a printed ballot, bearing the names of Republicans Taft, Roosevelt, LaFollette, and Cummins and Democrats Harmon, Wilson, Clark, and Folk, their first and second choices for president. There were 2,520 first choice votes cast for Republican candidates. Roosevelt received 1,720; LaFollette, 371; Taft, 310; and Cummins, 9. For second choice LaFollette received 759; Roosevelt, 474; Taft, 320; and Cummins, 122.\textsuperscript{20} This poll was taken before Roosevelt announced that he was a candidate.

Roosevelt and LaFollette both campaigned in Nebraska. The vigor of Roosevelt’s campaign is attested to in a telegram which he dispatched on April 20, 1912. “I got through Nebraska and Kansas all right and it was necessary to make the speeches but my voice is gone and there must be no repetition of such a program as that in Nebraska and Kansas for the simple reason that halfway through my voice would go completely.”\textsuperscript{21} LaFollette drew crowds and applause as he denounced both Taft and Roosevelt. The somewhat embittered senator stated in the auditorium at Lincoln, “The thing that made me the maddest was that I had been slugged by men whom I thought were my friends.” LaFollette went on to point out instances where, in his opinion, Roosevelt had betrayed the progressive cause.\textsuperscript{22} He drew some applause by a complimentary reference to William Jennings Bryan, and his speech was criticized by an editor supporting Taft for having advocated measures

\textsuperscript{19} Mulvey, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-136.

\textsuperscript{20} The first choice votes for the Democratic candidates were: Harmon, 80; Wilson, 50; Clark, 16; Bryan, 111; and Folk, 13. Bryan’s votes were write-ins. (*Nebraska State Journal*, February 18, 1912.)

\textsuperscript{21} Morison, *op. cit.*, p. 535.

\textsuperscript{22} *Nebraska State Journal*, April 6, 1912.
which would appeal to Democrats and for failing to praise the accomplishments of the Republicans.\textsuperscript{23}

The Democrats of Nebraska were concerned with their own primary election, and Democrats over the nation were concerned with the presidential preferences and plans of William Jennings Bryan. Bryan was the dominant figure in the Nebraska Democratic party in spite of party opposition stemming largely from the liquor issue and led by Gilbert Hitchcock, United States senator and publisher of the Omaha World-Herald.\textsuperscript{24} The liquor issue had ranged Bryan on the side of the drys and placed him in opposition to Democrats who had been his staunch supporters in past political battles. In 1910 he had failed to support James Dahlman's candidacy for governor, and Dahlman, the colorful "cowboy" mayor of Omaha, had lost to the Republican, Chester Aldrich. To some Nebraska Democrats this action was treachery, pure and simple,\textsuperscript{25} but Bryan's most bitter party opponents could not doubt his influence with great numbers of Democrats in and out of the state. The progressive movement seemed to many Democrats, as well as Republicans, to be the issue of paramount importance, especially in regard to the presidential elections, and Bryan had been an eloquent advocate of progressive legislation in three campaigns for the presidency.

The Democrats sensed a victory in the Republican dissenion, and there was no lack of hopeful candidates for the Democratic nomination. The pages of Bryan's paper, The Commoner, were watched for indications of which candidate Bryan favored or for indications that Bryan himself might seek his fourth nomination. Bryan endorsed no one candidate but reiterated that the Democrats must nominate a progressive. He devoted as much praise to the progressive former Governor of Missouri, Joseph W. Folk, as to

\textsuperscript{23} The Wayne Herald (Wayne, Nebraska), April 11, 1912.
\textsuperscript{24} Addison E. Sheldon, History of Nebraska (Chicago and New York, 1931), p. 872.
\textsuperscript{25} Arthur T. Mullen, Western Democrat (New York, 1940), p. 144.
any other candidate before Folk withdrew from the contest. The major candidates for the nomination were Woodrow Wilson, Governor of New Jersey; Champ Clark of Missouri, Speaker of the House of Representatives; and Judson Harmon, Governor of Ohio. Senator Oscar W. Underwood of Alabama and Thomas Marshall of Indiana were also mentioned.

Bryan’s endorsement of Wilson was sought by Wilson’s friend and advisor, Colonel E. M. House. House wrote to a friend that “Bryan’s support is absolutely essential, not only for the nomination but for the election afterwards; and I shall make it my particular province to keep in touch with him and influence him along the lines desired.”

House wrote to Bryan asking for suggestions “regarding the best way to meet the Wall Street attack” on Wilson. He planted the information in a letter of November 25, 1911, that “there is some evidence that Mr. Underwood and his friends intend to make a direct issue with you for control of the next convention, and it looks a little as if they were receiving some aid from Champ Clark and his friends.” The Texas colonel also saw to it that Bryan had pro-Wilson clippings to print in The Commoner. It is doubtful, however, if Bryan’s support of Wilson stemmed from House’s attempts at influence, for not even Bryan’s enemies accused him of political naivete.

Bryan was slow at voicing his preference among the Democratic presidential hopefuls. However, he was vigorous in his opposition to Judson Harmon, accusing the Ohio governor of drawing his support from the same interests that supported Taft. Bryan also expressed his disapproval of Oscar W. Underwood’s connection with the “interests.”

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27 Charles Seymour, ed., The Intimate Papers of Colonel House (Boston, 1926), p. 56.
28 Ibid., pp. 58 and 56.
29 The Commoner, January 19; February 2, 1912.
30 Ibid., April 12, 1912.
Above—Cartoon by Guy R. Spencer depicts the dilemma of the Nebraska Republican candidates in the election of 1912. Note the Teddyphant, predecessor of the Bull Moose as the symbol of Roosevelt's Progressive Party.

(Omaha Morning World-Herald, June 26, 1912)

Below—Nebraska welcomes Woodrow Wilson in the campaign of 1912

(Omaha Morning World-Herald, October 5, 1912)
Wilson and Bryan pause in the midst of the campaign to be photographed with Bryan's grandson, John, on the steps of Fairview, Bryan's Lincoln home, October 7, 1912.
As to Champ Clark and Woodrow Wilson, the two major contenders, *The Commoner* stated, “Mr. Bryan has not expressed a preference between Wilson and Clark. He would favor Clark in any state where Clark is stronger than Wilson. He would favor Wilson in any state where Wilson is stronger than Clark. His desire is to prevent the nomination of a reactionary candidate, the election of reactionary delegates or the adoption of a reactionary platform.” Bryan recommended to his followers a slate of delegates to the Democratic National Convention. He endorsed them as progressives and suggested that the *Commoner’s* readers clip the list of their names and take it to the polls. Bryan’s distrust of Harmon was so great that he announced that he would not support him even if Harmon were the choice of the Nebraska Democratic primary. Gilbert Hitchcock, a delegate and a Harmon man, called upon Bryan to withdraw his name as a candidate for delegate-at-large to the national convention. Bryan refused.

Clark’s managers took what comfort they could from Bryan’s statements of neutrality between Clark and Wilson. However, there were indications that Bryan was cool to Clark’s candidacy. Clark stated in his autobiography that he gave up hope of Bryan’s support at the Jackson Day banquet in Washington, D.C. on January 8, 1912. Wilson’s famous Joline letter had been made public, and the Democrats waited to see Bryan’s reaction. The Jackson Day banquet was the occasion of the first meeting of Wilson and Bryan after the publication of the Joline letter. Clark recalled that Bryan “treated me with scant courtesy and he and Governor Wilson lathered each other up with such fulsome eulogies . . .” Bryan had been less than en-

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31 Ibid., April 19, 1912.
32 Ibid.
34 Wilson had written to Adrian Joline in April, 1908, that, “Would that we could do something at once dignified and effective, to knock Mr. Bryan once for all into a cocked hat.”
thusiastic about Clark’s actions as speaker of the House. It seemed to Bryan that for some weeks before the Jackson Day banquet, Clark had seemed more concerned with harmony than progressive legislation. On November 24, 1911, The Commoner had stated:

There is a progressive majority in congress, but it lacks leadership. Speaker Clark is the one of whom leadership was expected but his usefulness in that capacity is being impaired ... partly by the mistaken idea that it is his special mission to preserve harmony among the democrats in the house ... Progress is more important than harmony.

The democratic party is a progressive party—nine-tenths of the rank and file are progressive, but one-tenth is powerful because it is made up of men with large corporate connections and the politicians whom they intimidate.

The progressive element in the party must have leadership in the house. If for any reason the speaker refuses to lead some one should be selected to marshal the reform forces and lead the fight ... If Mr. Clark had exhibited as speaker the qualities of leadership that made him speaker he would now be without a rival in the race for the presidential nomination. He has time yet to make himself a formidable candidate, but to do so he must LEAD. The people need a champion in the house—to whom will the honor go?

Clark’s Nebraska manager, Arthur Mullen, staged a vigorous campaign in behalf of Clark for the preferential primary. Clark had made a speaking tour through the state in 1911, and his reputation as a “wet” and his somewhat earthy anecdotes displeased some of his listeners, but, on the whole, Nebraskans seemed to like the Missouri Democrat.

Judson Harmon made a last minute appeal to Nebraska voters. Gilbert Hitchcock reported that while the Ohio Governor was not an “impassioned crusader” or a “strenuous exhorter” he was a man to whom “public office is a solemn and sacred trust.” As Hitchcock introduced Harmon to an Omaha audience he denounced Bryan as seeking to subvert the primary law by withholding support of Harmon

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36 Interview, May 10, 1956, with Dr. John G. W. Lewis, Lincoln, Nebraska.
37 Omaha Morning World-Herald, April 12, 1912.
even if Harmon carried the contest. The caustic Bernard McNeny, Webster County attorney, expressed the belief that Nebraska Democrats "are the subjects to no man" and that after each Republican victory that it was cold comfort to them to learn that their "leaders had renewed their Chautauqua contracts."38

The Nebraska preferential primary was held on April 19, 1912. The results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REPUBLICAN PRIMARY</th>
<th>DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theodore Roosevelt</td>
<td>Champ Clark.........</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. M. LaFollette</td>
<td>Woodrow Wilson....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. H. Taft........</td>
<td>Judson Harmon......</td>
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<tr>
<td>46,795</td>
<td>14,289</td>
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<tr>
<td>16,785</td>
<td>12,454</td>
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<td>18,341</td>
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The primary results and the fact that the state Democratic committee met and instructed the delegates to vote for Clark, led Arthur Mullen to believe that "Nebraska was signed, sealed and ready for delivery to Champ Clark of Missouri."40

The Republican delegates to the national convention met at Lincoln at the invitation of F. P. Corrick, a supporter of LaFollette. It was reported that radical LaFollette men and staunch Roosevelt supporters joined in a "love feast." They met in secret session, but the reports were that "They were all Roosevelt men and all for progressive principles."41 Governor Aldrich was conspicuous in the meeting. There was vague mention of possible cabinet posts for some of the seven governors who had first asked Roosevelt to run. In comment on the growing Roosevelt boom Aldrich announced with pride that "I guess Nebraska had as much to do with it as any other state."42 The

38 Ibid., April 13, 1912, p. 6. Bryan was a noted speaker in the Chautauqua circuits.
39 *Nebraska Blue Book* (Lincoln, 1918), p. 930.
40 Mullens, op. cit., p. 187.
41 *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), May 21, 1912. "The voters followed the presidential preference in voting for delegates and candidates for electors and even as Roosevelt was their choice for president it will be noted that the delegates to the National convention are those of the progressive stripe ..." (The *Nebraska Daily Press* [Nebraska City], April 26, 1912.)
42 Ibid., May 30, 1912.
state Republican delegation seemed safe for Roosevelt.

The Republican convention met in Chicago on June 18, 1912. Victor Rosewater, editor of the *Omaha Bee*, and a Taft man, had been defeated in the Republican primary for the post of national committeeman by Robert B. Howell, a Roosevelt supporter. Howell attempted to claim his place on the Republican National Committee before the convention met in order that he might take part in the committee's deliberations on delegations contested between Roosevelt and Taft. Rosewater claimed that his term as national committeeman had not yet expired, and the committee backed his stand and elected him its chairman by unanimous consent.43

The Republican National Committee under Rosewater's chairmanship met in Chicago on June 6, 1912, and began to decide most of the contests in favor of the Taft delegations. Roosevelt and his supporters believed, with some reason, that the rank and file of the Republican party were for Roosevelt and were infuriated at the committee's action. The Nebraska delegates and a group of over a hundred boosters led by Governor Aldrich arrived in Chicago on June 16 and began to protest the "steam-roller" tactics before they were out of the railroad station. The Nebraska delegation then met in executive session and drafted a resolution condemning Rosewater and affirming allegiance to Roosevelt.

We represent a state that has been humiliated by the actions of our national committeeman, Mr. Victor Rosewater, who has been personally repudiated by the Republicans of our state and who did not represent the wishes or views of the Republican party of Nebraska in the deliberations of the national committee.44

The national conventions of 1912 have been dealt with in many books and articles. The Chicago convention was

43 Victor Rosewater, *Back Stage in 1912* (Philadelphia, 1932), pp. 85-86. Another Nebraskan to play a part in the Republican convention in support of Taft was William Hayward, lawyer from Otoe County and secretary to the Republican National Committee. (*Who's Who in America* 1912-1913 [Chicago, 1912], p. 929.)

44 *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, June 18, 1912.
reported on at the time by a group of newspapermen and writers which included William Jennings Bryan, Edna Ferber, William Allen White, and Finley Peter Dunne. Bryan drew much attention from the delegates, galleries, and press, and cheers for Bryan, who was leaving the hall, interrupted the reading of the platform by former Vice-President Fairbanks to such an extent that he could not continue until the Nebraskan was out of the building.45

Victor Rosewater was no more deterred from his support of Taft by the Nebraska resolution than were the other Taft supporters by the gallery support of Roosevelt,46 or by his array of primary election victories. Rosewater called the tumultuous convention to order. The Roosevelt floor manager, Governor Herbert Hadley of Missouri,47 challenged the list of delegates presented by the national committee and was ruled out-of-order. For seven hours Rosewater was on the rostrum attempting to make himself heard over shouts of “Steal,” “Thief,” and “Steam Roller.” Rosewater has described himself as “small of stature and not strong in voice.”48 The reporters present gave colorful, if not cruel, descriptions to their newspapers. Edna Ferber wrote:

Two numbers there were on the program which might have been dispensed with. One was the band. The other was Chairman Victor Rosewater . . . The crowd yelled, “Speak up, little boy” to Victor Rosewater. That gentleman turned a bewildered, white and helpless face to right and left, pounded freely with his gavel . . . He looked feeble and minute behind that gavel.49

William Allen White saw Rosewater as a “scared young man gripping a large burly gavel.” George Fitch reported, “Victor Rosewater, a neat little man with chinchilla hair, who looked far too small to referee an elephant fight, began

45 Collier’s, the National Weekly, July 6, 1912, p. 12.
46 The galleries were not organized for Roosevelt in 1912 as they were for Willkie in 1940, but they were vociferous in his favor. (Interview with J. Hyde Sweet, November 11, 1956. Mr. Sweet had a seat in the galleries.)
47 Hadley had succeeded Joseph Folk as governor of Missouri in 1909.
49 Nebraska State Journal, June 21, 1912.
to pound the meeting to order with slow measured whacks."\(^{50}\) Rosewater, pale or not, stuck to his task and when he delivered the gavel to Elihu Root, the permanent chairman, the convention was well on its way to renominating William Howard Taft for the presidency of the United States.\(^{51}\)

After Taft's nomination Nebraska's Republican delegates\(^{52}\) followed the other Roosevelt partisans in their history-making bolt to Orchestra Hall.\(^{53}\) When they returned to Nebraska, however, it was found that not all Roosevelt supporters favored the establishment of a third party. Governor Aldrich and the newly elected national committeeman, R. B. Howell, feared the effect that a third party would have on the Republican state ticket.\(^{54}\) George Norris, who had been cheered as he sat on the stage in Orchestra Hall, and who was the Republican candidate for the Senate, did not call for a third party organization in Nebraska. Instead, Norris called upon progressive Republicans of the state to control the state convention which was to meet in Lincoln on July 30 and prevent any endorsement of Taft. He pointed out that the Republican primary had nominated a progressive ticket and that the state convention should adopt a platform endorsing "those progressive policies that have been and are advocated by Colonel Roosevelt and most of the Republican candidates in Nebraska." This action would demonstrate that Nebraska Republicans were progressive and "are practically a unit in opposition to fraudulent and dishonest methods that were used by discarded

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) The Roosevelt-supporting Nebraska Daily Press, Nebraska City, June 25, 1912 commented, "The steamroller worked perfectly. It is in tip-top shape ... Little Vic ... is a dandy engineer, but he will run into an open switch when he tries to roll the machine over Nebraska."

\(^{52}\) Two of the sixteen-man Nebraska delegation voted for Roosevelt on the first and only ballot. The other fourteen refused to vote because of the certainty of a Taft victory. (The Nebraska Daily Press [Nebraska City], June 23, 1912.)

\(^{53}\) Sunday State Journal (Lincoln), June 23, 1912.

\(^{54}\) Mulvey, op. cit., p. 141.
political bosses in Chicago."\(^{55}\)

The Republican county conventions met and selected delegates to the state convention. There were contested delegations in nine counties, and there was some feeling that this was an attempt on the part of the state Republican executive committee to duplicate the Chicago proceedings. Governor Chester Aldrich issued a signed statement to the newspapers:

There are delegates being contested before this committee who have been elected by an honestly constituted majority in county conventions... The standard fixed by the committee is "Will they approve the Chicago Convention" and if not then they are not republicans and not entitled to sit in a republican convention...

I make the criticism that this committee is seriously hearing contests about which there is no merit and that are brought about as a subterfuge and pretext...

It is generally reported that Victor Rosewater, late of the Chicago Convention, has instructed postmasters and other people out in the state, to send contesting delegations to this convention and that they would be counted as the steam roller would be used here as it was in Chicago.\(^{56}\)

The convention met in the Lindell Hotel in Lincoln, and the progressives found themselves in control of the situation. Governor Aldrich was elected temporary chairman over the objections of S. A. Searle of Douglas County, the leader of the Taft delegates, who stated that it was "a grievous wrong" to choose a man who would not support his party's nominee for the presidency. When it became obvious that Aldrich would gavel the convention to a progressive victory, Searle led the delegations of Douglas, Saline, Colfax, Madison, Dawes, Boyd, Dodge, Cuming, and Cass Counties out of the hotel. They were joined by members of other county delegations, and under a large blue Taft banner they paraded across town to the Lincoln Hotel where they held a rump meeting and endorsed the candi-

\(^{55}\) *Nebraska State Journal*, July 10, 1912. Norris denounced Taft on the floor of the House after the Chicago convention and read the entire proceedings of the Bull Moose Convention into the *Congressional Record*. (Richard L. Neuberger and Stephen B. Kahn, *Integrity, the Life of George W. Norris* [New York, 1937], p. 48.)

\(^{56}\) *Nebraska State Journal*, July 30, 1912.
dacy of Taft. The progressives drew up a platform which included a reduction of tariff, trust regulations, representation at national conventions based on votes, state committee to be selected by the primary, continuation of the presidential primary, direct election of senators, limitation of power of federal courts, new road laws, woman suffrage, shorter ballot, initiative, referendum, recall, and conservation of water power. They did not endorse Roosevelt or any other candidate for president.

The Bull Moose party met in Lincoln on July 31, 1912. It was called together by Judge Arthur G. Wray of York who presided over the meeting. The secretary of the meeting was John C. Sprecher of Schuyler, a former Populist member of the state legislature. Also present and active were C. B. Manuel, who in 1910 had been chairman of the Populist State Committee, and W. F. Porter, formerly a Populist secretary of state for Nebraska. Jasper L. McBrien, a former Republican and Nebraska state superintendent of schools, 1905-1909, was the chairman of the resolutions committee. Sixteen delegates with one-half vote each were chosen to go to the national convention of the Progressive Party which was to meet in Chicago on August 5. The resolutions labeled the Democratic and Republican parties as reactionary and "under control of the bosses," endorsed Theodore Roosevelt for president, and arranged for another convention to be held in September.

The Progressives held their second meeting on September 3 and were addressed by Roosevelt's running mate, Senator Hiram Johnson of California. They endorsed the entire Republican state ticket, including Chester Aldrich for governor and George W. Norris for senator. Several Republican candidates visited the convention during the day, and Samuel McKelvie, candidate for lieutenant governor, while not in the hall, was observed that day to be wearing a large Bull Moose button.

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57 Nebraska State Journal, July 31, 1912.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., August 1, 1912.
60 Ibid., September 4, 1912.
ELECTION 1908

Election results by counties, 1908
Election results by counties, 1912
Republicans for Roosevelt, Republicans for Taft, and Progressives for Roosevelt all wished to place electors on the November ballot. Of the eight Republican electors selected at the primary election, six announced that they were going to cast their ballots for Roosevelt. Their position was explained by Don C. Van Deusen, editor of the Blair Pilot, in an editorial on April 17, 1912. “If the nomination should have gone to Roosevelt by right, and we believe it should then aren’t these six Roosevelt men more honorable to stay by the real choice of the people than to condone the theft of the nomination?” The Progressive Party endorsed these six men and petitioned that the two Taft electors should be removed from the ballot and be replaced by two Progressives who would vote for Roosevelt. The Nebraska Republican State Central Committee declared, on the other hand, that the six electors who refused to vote for the Republican candidate, Taft, should be removed from the ballot and be replaced by Taft men. The committee brought suit against the secretary of state to compel him to prepare a ballot which would insure that the Republican electors would vote for Taft.

The Nebraska Supreme Court cleared up the confused electoral problem. It recognized the right of the Progressive Party to appear on the ballot. The court then ruled that the Republican electors should be Taft supporters and that Roosevelt electors should be labeled Progressives. It stated:

To permit the names of the six electors, who will not vote for the candidates of the republican party for president and vice president but will vote for the candidates of another and different party, to be printed on the ballot as republican electors would be a gross deception, and would, without the possibility of a doubt, cause thousands of voters in this state to cast their votes for president and vice president for candidates other than their choice... We can not permit this to be done.

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61 Ibid., September 4, 1912.
62 Morrissey v. Wait, Nebraska Reports, XCII, 271-279. Nebraska, Kansas, South Dakota, West Virginia, California, and Maine had no third party ticket except for presidential electors.
63 State v. Wait, Nebraska Reports, XCII, 313-330.
Nebraska Democrats viewed the travails of their Republican and Progressive rivals without dismay. Their party had met in Baltimore and nominated Woodrow Wilson for the presidency, and they sensed a victory in November. The Baltimore convention had been as dramatic as had the Chicago meeting, and a Nebraskan had been the central figure. To George Fitch, reporting the convention, it seemed as if William Jennings Bryan had the power “to take the whole meeting out of hand and lead it down Charles Street at the end of a rope.”

Bryan had gone to Baltimore as a member of the Nebraska delegation, which was instructed to support Champ Clark, the winner of the Nebraska Democratic primary. Bryan had been calling upon the Democrats for months to nominate a progressive candidate for president. Before he arrived in Baltimore he discovered that the Democratic National Committee had selected Judge Alton Parker as temporary chairman. He believed Parker to be “the one Democrat who is ... in the eyes of the public, most conspicuously identified with the reactionary element of our party.” Bryan sent telegrams to Clark, Wilson, and the other “progressive candidates” calling upon them to join him in opposition to Parker as temporary chairman. Clark declined in the interest of harmony but, Wilson answered, “You are right ... No one will doubt where my sympathies lie...”

Bryan took his opposition to Parker to the convention floor. In remarks well chosen for their effect upon the public opinion of the great mass of Democrats he warned the delegates:

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66 George Fitch was an Illinois newspaper man and author. He had been editor of the Peoria Herald Transcript, 1905-1911, and was a member of the Illinois House of Representatives. He died in 1915, at the age of thirty-eight. (Who Was Who in America [Chicago, 1942], p. 402.)
65 Omaha Morning World-Herald, June 29, 1912.
67 Ibid., pp. 164 and 165.
We need not deceive ourselves with the thought that that which is done in a national convention is done in secret...

The delegates of this convention must not presume upon the ignorance of those who did not come, either because they had not influence enough to be elected delegates or money enough to pay the expenses of the trip, but who have as much interest in the party's welfare as we who speak for them today.

Those people will know that the influence that dominated the convention at Chicago and made its conclusion a farce are here and more brazenly at work than they were in Chicago.65

Parker was elected temporary chairman, defeating Bryan by a vote of 579 to 508.66 Wilson's supporters voted for Bryan while Clark's men were for Parker. Bryan seemed unperturbed by his defeat, and it was soon apparent that he had achieved his purpose. He had emphasized that there was a contest between progressives and conservatives in the Democratic party. "The folks at home" were aroused and began sending telegrams of disapproval to the delegates in Baltimore. The Montana delegation had cast one vote against Bryan, and it received the following message. "Send us the name of the......... who voted for Parker. We want to meet him when he comes home."70

The telegraph companies estimated that 110,000 telegrams were received by the delegates during the convention. Bryan later stated, "I had simply turned the faucet and allowed public sentiment to flow in upon the convention."71

The forces that had defeated Bryan for temporary chairman attempted to placate him with an offer of the permanent chairmanship. He turned it down, telling the messengers "that those who own the ship should furnish the crew."72 He accepted a position on the platform committee and offered a resolution that the platform should

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66 The vote of the Nebraska delegation was 13-3 in favor of Bryan. Senator Hitchcock's was one of the dissenting votes. (Patterson, op. cit., chap. 8, p. 13.)
70 Bryan, op. cit., p. 169.
71 Ibid. p. 170.
72 Ibid. p. 171.
be withheld until a candidate for president was nominated and could be consulted about it.\textsuperscript{73}

Bryan's subsequent moves at the convention have been dealt with many times by historians and other commentators on America's political past.\textsuperscript{74} His first verbal bombshell came with the introduction of a resolution that the convention pledge itself "opposed to the nomination of any candidate for president who is the representative of or under obligation to J. Pierpont Morgan, Thomas F. Ryan, August Belmont, or any other member of the privilege-hunting and favor seeking class." Thomas Fortune Ryan was a member of the Virginia delegation, and August Belmont was a member of the New York delegation. Bryan explained, through the pandemonium that his announcement caused, that "J. Pierpont Morgan, Thomas F. Ryan and August Belmont are three of the men who are connected with the great money trust of this country. . . . If any of you are willing to nominate a candidate who represents these men—or who is under obligation to these men, do it and take the responsibility. . . ." A West Virginia delegate shouted excitedly that Bryan would destroy the Democratic party. Bryan answered with the Biblical quotation, "If thine right hand offend thee cut it off."\textsuperscript{75} The resolution infuriated and disturbed many of the delegates, but it passed because a negative vote would have been interpreted by the "folks at home" as a vote for the "privilege seeking class." Many Democrats would have agreed with the Texas delegate, Cone Johnson, who stated, "all I know and all I want to know is that Bryan is on one side, and Wall Street is on the other."\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} The space limitations of this article necessitate a rather limited treatment of the convention. See: M. R. Werner, \textit{Bryan} (New York, 1929); J. C. Long, \textit{Bryan, The Great Commoner} (New York, 1928); William Jennings Bryan, \textit{A Tale of Two Conventions} (New York, 1912), and Bryan, \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{75} Bryan had planned to include in his resolution an unflattering reference to President Taft but refrained because Mrs. Taft was in the audience. Taft later wrote a letter of thanks to Bryan for this courtesy. (Bryan, \textit{Memoirs}, p. 176.)

\textsuperscript{76} Werner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 188.
The balloting revealed that neither Clark nor Wilson could command the necessary two-thirds vote. Nine ballots were cast, with each making gains as favorite sons dropped from the running. A break came on the tenth ballot when the New York delegation shifted its ninety votes from Harmon to Clark. The New York vote touched off a jubilant Clark demonstration. As seventeen-year-old Genevieve Clark was being carried about the hall on the shoulders of her father's cheering supporters, William Jennings Bryan came to the floor and took his seat with the Nebraska delegation. On the fourteenth ballot Bryan arose and asked to be allowed to explain his vote. He stated that the New York vote was controlled by the same influences, "the privilege-seeking, favor hunting class," that dominated the Chicago convention and that the Democrats must not nominate a candidate under obligation to influences which could say to him, "Remember your creator." Bryan stated that for this reason he cast his vote for Woodrow Wilson. Nebraska voted twelve for Wilson and four for Clark. The move infuriated the Clark forces; fist fights broke out, and police "fought in vain to quiet the shrieking fighting mob." The balloting continued until Wilson won on the forty-sixth ballot. It was conceded by friends and foes of Bryan that his action had given Woodrow Wilson the nomination. Clark wrote that Bryan's "malicious slanders" had defeated him. Arthur Mullen, who had managed Clark's Nebraska campaign, wrote an autobiography, The Western Democrat, in which he titled the chapter on the election of 1912, "The Story of Bryan's Treachery." To the astute observer from Emporia, Kansas, William Allen White, Bryan was a "Strange figure in that convention, a ridiculous man with tremendous power . . . who even in victory looked like an

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77 Bryan had not appeared on the convention floor until the tenth ballot.  
78 Bryan, A Tale of Two Conventions, pp. 194-197.  
76 Senator Hitchcock and three other Nebraska delegates voted for Clark until Wilson was nominated by acclamation on the forty-sixth ballot. (Patterson, op. cit., chap. 8, p. 16.)  
80 Commoner, July 6, 1912.  
81 Clark, op. cit., p. 392.  
82 Mullen, op. cit., p. 159.
adorable old rag doll, but who had steel at the core." White wrote:

To understand the drama we must realize that, ballot by ballot, the country was standing around the billboards of newspapers in great crowds, watching the Baltimore struggle. The cleavage between progressives and conservatives which had been opened by the Chicago convention was deepened and widened in the hearts of the American people by the spectacle at Baltimore. Clark, who was a better politician than Taft, had not revealed his conservatism. That showed forth in the character of his supporting delegates, and after he held his majority for a day the nation realized, as the convention had realized from the first click of the temporary chairman's gavel, that Clark and Bryan were fighting the battle that Roosevelt had lost to Taft.

And when the Nebraska delegation, after days and days of balloting for Clark, broke to Wilson... all the country knew that Clark's day was done—that the progressives were about to win a victory in Baltimore to offset the defeat in Chicago.83

Clark believed that Bryan tried to deadlock the convention in order to secure the nomination for himself.84 Arthur Mullen stated that Charles Bryan's hotel room was filled with badges and banners for his brother and that some of the delegates voted for Wilson in order to prevent Bryan from obtaining the prize.85 However, Bryan had declared that he was not a candidate in 1912, and his wife wrote to Colonel House after the convention:

It was a remarkable fight. I never was so proud of Mr. Bryan—he managed so well. He threw the opponents into confusion; they could not keep from blundering and he out-generated them at every point... Under the circumstances I am sure the nomination went to the best place and am entirely satisfied with the result. Will said all the time he did not think it was his time, and when we found how things were set up we were sure of it.86

83 White, op. cit., pp. 477-480. Colliers reported that the service done by Mr. Bryan to his country and his party will not be forgotten. He was described, "Yet from first to last, sitting in the seat of a delegate with his palm leaf fan without a tremor in his fingers throughout the long and fierce battle, with a little of his conscious-ness of power playing at the corners of his mouth and with the light springing up in his eyes as the few who came to greet him touched his shoulder. Mr. Bryan was the figure of a master..." (Colliers, The National Weekly, July 13, 1912, p. 24.)
84 Clark, op. cit., p. 398.
85 Mullen, op. cit., p. 174.
86 Seymour, op. cit., p. 69.
Bryan was given a hero's welcome upon his return to Lincoln. The Lincoln Star reported, “Lincoln, just as it has done every four years since 1896, went mad this morning, when a man, wearing baggy trousers and alpaca coat, stepped from the train, home again from a Democratic convention.” Escorted uptown by Governor Aldrich, Bryan addressed the crowd for an hour giving the folks at home an account of the Baltimore convention. Referring to Nebraska's preferential primary vote for Clark, he said:

You know I took some chances when I took the liberty to lay aside the letter of the instructions to obey the spirit of the instructions. I took some chances but no man is fit to be a general on the field who has not the courage to disobey orders when exigencies require it. I know that the people of Nebraska wanted a progressive who can lead the progressive fight and when the conditions disclosed that Clark could not lead a progressive fight my action represented the progressive spirit of this state, both democratic and republican.87

The Nebraska Democrats held their state convention at Grand Island on July 31, 1912. The high point of the convention was the debate over a resolution endorsing Bryan's stand at Baltimore and his disregard for the instructions for Clark. The resolution commended Bryan for standing by the interests of the “folks at home” and transforming the Baltimore convention from a “reactionary gathering into a real democratic convention.”88 The anti-Bryan delegates led by the Douglas County delegation opposed the resolution. Arthur Mullen termed it an “unnecessary dose” for Clark men to have to swallow. The resolution carried by a vote of 636-246, and Nebraska Democrats turned to the campaign.88

Bryan also received praise in the state Progressive party platform. “Hats off to Colonel Bryan, who like a gladiator, put several Tammany tigers out of commission.

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87 The Lincoln Daily Star, July 5, 1912. Bryan’s Baltimore victory did not bring him unmixed joy. He remarked to a Lincoln friend, “I’ve lost a lot of old friends and made a lot of new ones and I don’t know how I and the new ones are going to get along.” (Nebraska State Journal, July 10, 1912.)
88 Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1938 (Nebraska Works Project Administration, 1940), pp. 355-356.
89 The Grand Island Daily Independent, July 31, 1912.
temporarily by forcing the nomination of such a man as Woodrow Wilson for president at Baltimore.” It went on to state, however, that, “The mere fact that such a man as Colonel Bryan could under the advantage of the two-thirds rule, by his physical endurance, by his moral courage, by his matchless art as a parliamentarian force the nomination of Woodrow Wilson, is not sufficient evidence that Congressman Underwood and a reactionary congress has been converted to the progressive cause . . . The Democratic party in spite of all Colonel Bryan can do is now and will continue to be reactionary.”

The state Populist party met at Aurora on August 8, and after assuring itself that it was not really dead, pledged its “undivided and earnest support to Woodrow Wilson,” and endorsed the “brave and heroic stand of William Jennings Bryan at Baltimore.”

The Progressive and Democratic candidates both campaigned in Nebraska. Roosevelt visited the state in September and was an energetic and colorful campaigner. In Hastings, Nebraska, on September 20, flanked on the platform by Governor Aldrich and George Norris, he informed the crowd, “Opposed to us are the men who have stolen the machinery of the Republican party and the men who in your own state tried to steal the party machinery. They had no more right to it than a pirate on the high seas who robs a ship—men such as Penrose of Pennsylvania and your own Victor Rosewater . . . They talk about regularity and insurgency. I want to say right here that theft does not confer regularity . . . Taft is a dead cock in the pit.”

60 Nebraska Party Platforms, pp. 363-364. The ardent Progressive editor of the Blair Pilot based his opposition to the Democrats upon the assertion that the regulars of the Democratic party were not progressive and that the Democratic stand for a low tariff was economically unsound. (The Pilot, July 17, 1912.)

61 The Aurora Sun, August 8, 1912.

62 The anomaly of the Republican position in Nebraska was illustrated by the fact that Norris could ride on the Roosevelt campaign train on September 20, and on November 2 be introduced on an Omaha platform by former congressman John L. Kennedy, an ardent Taft supporter. (Lincoln Star, November 3, 1912.)

63 Hastings Daily Republican, September 20, 1912.
Another Progressive Party campaigner was Jane Adams, social worker and advocate of woman suffrage. She had been one of the delegates to the National Progressive Convention and she told a Lincoln audience that by supporting the Progressive party and the ticket of Theodore Roosevelt and Hiram Johnson she was urging the same things she had been fighting for during all her social service work.  

The Democrats closed ranks and campaigned for Wilson. Senator Hitchcock's Omaha World-Herald led the state newspaper support for Wilson, and Bryan campaigned tirelessly in and out of Nebraska. The highpoint of the Democratic effort was Wilson's visit to the state. He arrived in Lincoln on October 5 and was greeted by a crowd, said to be the largest and most enthusiastic of his campaign tour, which cheered him and Bryan as they rode together through the street. Wilson spoke in Lincoln at the Lindell Hotel, the city auditorium, the University, and the Labor Temple. He paid tribute to Bryan and called Lincoln "the mecca of progressive democracy." His speeches emphasized the progressive aspects of the Democratic platform. Wilson was a guest at Fairview, the Bryan home, and on Sunday morning the two men, both Presbyterian elders, attended services at Westminster Presbyterian Church. Wilson left that afternoon for the Rocky Mountain states, and his host took another train for a speaking tour through the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Iowa.

The Nebraska voters went to the polls and gave Nebraska's electoral vote to Woodrow Wilson. He carried seventy-three counties to Roosevelt's seventeen and Taft's
The popular vote indicated a closer race. Wilson received 109,008 votes; Roosevelt, 72,689; Taft, 54,216; and Debs, the Socialist candidate, 10,185. Wilson had 46 percent of the total vote, Roosevelt, 31 percent and Taft, 23.

The arithmetic of the returns indicates that Wilson owed his victory to the defection from the Republican ranks of the Roosevelt men. However, a factor in the election, perhaps more important than the split in the Republican party, was the regard that Nebraska voters held for the economic, political, and social measures which were termed progressive. In a series of presidential elections they supported the candidate identified in the public mind as progressive. In 1904 they had voted for Theodore Roosevelt instead of his conservative opponent, Alton Parker, and in 1908 they supported Bryan over Taft. Some of the most ardent Roosevelt men of 1912 and officials of the Progressive Party helped Wilson carry Nebraska in 1916 against undivided Republican opposition. One of them, Don Van Deusen of the Blair Pilot explained their position: "The Progressive movement greatly appealed to us and we felt entirely at home championing its forward looking program for social betterment . . . Under Wilson more than half of the 1912 progressive party platform was enacted into law and the platform he is now running on is more progressive than the one Hughes is running on." In 1912 Taft was labeled, perhaps unjustly, as a reactionary, and it seems probable that a sizeable number of the Roosevelt voters would have supported Wilson had not Roosevelt been on the ticket. An editorial in a Nebraska City paper stated, "Nebraska is a progressive state. The voters of both parties are men who will not support reactionary candidates for office." It seems likely that Woodrow Wilson would

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89 Boyd County was tied between Roosevelt and Wilson.
101 Blair Pilot, November 1, 1916.
102 Ibid.
103 Nebraska Daily Press (Nebraska City), June 27, 1912.
have received Nebraska’s vote even had Taft been supported by an undivided party and the call of the Bull Moose had not sounded in Nebraska.