



## William Jennings Bryan and the Nebraska Senatorial Election of 1893

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# WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN AND THE NEBRASKA SENATORIAL ELECTION OF 1893

BY PAOLO E. COLETTA

THE Nebraska senatorial election of 1893 proved a side-show for William Jennings Bryan in which he lost more than he gained, but it is evident that he learned some lessons from his experience and that the election was considered important enough in national affairs to justify the intervention of the Democratic National Committee in a state contest. The election marked a third step in the Democratic surge to power in a traditionally Republican state. First had come the election of James E. Boyd as governor; second, the election and re-election of Bryan, William A. McKeighan and Omar M. Kem to Congress; and this third step, the retirement of a Republican and the sending to the United States Senate of William V. Allen, who represented the allied Democratic and Populist parties of Nebraska. Bryan did not become a senator, but he was instrumental in the election of a loyal, able friend who promised to co-operate with him both in state and national affairs.

Of the nationally known persons involved in the contest special attention centers upon Bryan, J. Sterling Morton and James E. Boyd in the Democratic camp; John M. Thurston, and the incumbent senator, Algernon S. Paddock, on the Republican side; and John Holbrook Powers and William Vincent Allen in the Populist ranks. All of these men, with the exception of Bryan, were oldtimers in Nebraska, although Allen was a recent convert to Populism. Bryan also was the youngest among them, having reached the age of thirty-two on March 19, 1892. Lack of space precludes but passing reference to the principles and personalities of all these major actors on the Nebraska political stage in 1893 and dictates that interest be directed toward the young-

est and most eloquent newcomer to Nebraska, William Jennings Bryan.

Almost from the day of his arrival in Nebraska from Illinois,<sup>1</sup> October 1, 1887, his third wedding anniversary, Bryan had been known as the Darling of the Democrats, as a proponent of a characteristically Western as opposed to an Eastern political outlook, and as a lawyer eager to shed the legal mantle for the alpaca coat as soon as possible. His friendship with J. Sterling Morton and Gilbert M. Hitchcock did much to popularize his name throughout the state, and his wide stumping tour in support of Morton and tariff reform in 1888 made his name a household word in the State of High Winds. For the next few years he hitched his star to Morton, Nebraska's grand old Democrat—and the Father of Arbor Day treated his protege very well indeed until disagreement arose over the currency question. Between 1890 and 1892 Bryan shied away from the tutelage of the Sage of Arbor Lodge and veered away from the gold standard predilections of Grover Cleveland. He appeared as a Moses to lead the people, and, after a whirlwind campaign, was elected to Congress from the Nebraska First District in 1890. His platform then included, among other things, tariff reform, direct election of federal senators, control of railroads, trusts and other monopolies, income tax and free silver coinage—planks sufficiently close to the demands of the Farmers' Alliance to earn him badly needed independent votes and more than enough to provoke charges from moss-back Democrats that he was a fusionist. Between his election and the date of assumption of duty at Washington the Young Lochinvar of the West studied the money question and made silver and tariff speeches throughout the Middle West. These were deemed so superior to the customary dribble of paunchy politicians that they elicited the first "Bryan for President" editorials. Bryan insisted that he

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<sup>1</sup> For Bryan's background in Illinois see Paolo E. Coletta, "Silas Bryan of Salem," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XLII (March, 1949), 57-59; and, "The Youth of William Jennings Bryan: The Beginnings of a Christian Statesman," *Nebraska History*, XXXI (March, 1950), 1-24.



WILLIAM VINCENT ALLEN  
United States Senator, 1893-1901

was merely a student, not the master, of the intricate problems involved in the money question as late as the fall of 1891, but nothing is more certain than that he, more than anyone else, was instrumental in getting the Nebraska Democratic state platform to declare for free silver in 1891 or that he was a confirmed free silver man when he swore his oath as a member of the Fifty-second Congress on December 7, 1891.

In return for his assistance to William M. Springer in the latter's unsuccessful contest for the speakership, Bryan was appointed to the Ways and Means Committee. As a member of that committee he labored diligently for tariff reform, making a speech on March 16, 1892, which electrified the House and brought him for the first time into the national limelight. Throughout the first session of the Fifty-second Congress, nevertheless, he gave what support he could to Richard "Silver Dick" Bland, chairman of the House Coinage Committee and perennial free silver champion, and spoke in favor of silver whenever he took to the stump. He had the audacity, in March, 1892, to stump Rhode Island for tariff reform *and* free silver simultaneously with but independently of President Cleveland, who spoke on tariff reform but whose tongue was frozen on the money question. Morton began to lose hope of ever saving his friend from what he considered his financial vagaries. Cleveland, referring to men like Bryan who tried to push a free silver bill through the House in March, 1892, spoke about those who would "navigate the ship on the rocks of free coinage." Bryan was one of those who grieved on March 24, "the night free silver was killed." As the date for the Democratic national convention approached he let himself be known as a supporter of silverite Horace Boies rather than goldite Grover Cleveland. Then a coalition of Cleveland Democrats in Nebraska attempted to deny him a congressional renomination. Bryan accepted the ultimatum and announced from Washington that he would attend the state convention for the specific purpose of introducing a free silver plank. He would give Morton, Tobias "Toburlington" Castor and their ilk all the fight they wanted. But in the April 13-14 con-

vention, despite an amazing and almost single-handed fight, the Silver Knight was brutally unhorsed by the steamroller tactics of such men as Castor, Euclid Martin, N. S. Harwood, Albert Watkins, A. J. Sawyer, and Governor Boyd. In the same breath with which the convention endorsed Cleveland as presidential candidate, however, it paradoxically endorsed Bryan. It was enough to "tree" the most astute political reporters. But perhaps the loss of the battle made the winning of the war possible, for Bryan's magnificent fight attracted not only the Young Democracy of the state to him but almost all of the Independents who were not middle-of-the-roaders.

Back in Congress Bryan spoke against repealing the tax on state bank note issues and revealed himself out of step with the national platform of 1888. In a short stumping tour of the South he took three texts—tariff reform, income tax, and bimetallism. The conditions were such in the campaign of 1892 that everyone conceded his re-nomination. On June 20, two days before the meeting of the national convention in Chicago, he jumped back into the saddle, the delegates applauding the reading of a poem which set the tone for the convention:

... a Moses has come—he has heard and come!  
He is armed with truth, and he knows not fear.  
He is heralded neither with bugle nor drum,  
But out on the prairies is rising a cheer,  
For the men in the furrows are pausing to say  
That a Moses has come to lead on to the fray.  
For the hour has come, and the place and the man.  
And the right will triumph as right only can.  
And now our oppressors may clamor and rave,  
For we march on to vict'ry with Bryan the Brave.

In Chicago, despite his efforts to wean the Nebraska delegation away from Cleveland, Bryan saw Cleveland nominated on the first ballot. He made a mental reservation, however, to the effect that Cleveland was the party's choice, not his, and that he would support the party's choice, but he would not go outside of his own district to help him, for he considered Cleveland no longer a representative of the agrarian and urban masses, but one who saw things

through spectacles provided by a capitalistic ideology, one who was unfit to comprehend the social forces which were loosed with the Agrarian Crusade. Bryan was driven to the fringe of the Democracy by the renomination of Cleveland but he did not jump the party fence. Had he done so he assuredly would have been in Omaha helping to give birth to the Populist party. Instead he was in New York hobnobbing with the gaily attired sachems of Tammany. His speech in Madison Square Garden was on Thomas Jefferson, and the magnificent audience happily applauded the efforts of William "O'Brien." During the campaign Bryan spoke for James B. Weaver in the latter's old district across the river from Omaha, but consistently refused to speak for Cleveland. In the last days of the first session of the Fifty-second Congress he again helped Bland to push a silver bill through the House, and again unsuccessfully. He made special note of a bill which Senator Sherman introduced and used it as his text during the closing days of the campaign to prove that an attempt would be made to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. His very last remarks for the session were in favor of free silver.

In his local canvass Bryan forced the fight against his Republican opponent, Judge Allen W. Field of Lincoln. It was an uphill struggle all the way, for the Republican managers brought William McKinley and Joseph Foraker into the state to counter his tariff reform speeches. Perhaps only incidentally for Bryan's sake, but nevertheless acting as an antidote to McKinley and Foraker, Weaver and Mrs. Lease came to Lincoln for the last days of the campaign. On the night before election both the Democrats and Populists went out on parade, shouting loudly for the Chevalier Bayard of Nebraska and the young and handsome exponent of free silver coinage and Western rights. Bryan forced Field to discuss the money question and quite effectively wiped the floor with him in a series of debates. He won, however, by only 140 votes.

In the short session of the Fifty-second Congress, December 5, 1892, to March 4, 1893, Bryan spoke against both the repeal of the Sherman law and the issuance of gold

bonds, measures he considered the first and second skirmishes in the battle of the standards. By the time he returned to Nebraska for the Christmas holidays he knew that Cleveland was weaving a noose for him and that he had ordered Speaker Crisp to perform the execution by denying him his post on the Ways and Means Committee in the Fifty-third Congress. It was at this point that Bryan threw himself into the Nebraska senatorial election.<sup>2</sup>

Chronologically the story of Bryan's efforts to be elected a United States senator in 1893 spans the opening and closing of the second session of the Fifty-second Congress. Because Bryan had little hope, time or money, he put forth little exertion, but the complicated squabble revealed many things and put him on his mark for his second and last attempt to become a senator, in 1894-95. Nowhere better was his conviction upheld that senators should be elected directly by the people, for the battle was really one over patronage rather than over principle. What principle was involved centered mainly about the money question, and the myriad persons in the contest ranged themselves with him, against him, or, in the case of some middle-of-the-road Populists, against him and everyone else not a Populist. It was truly a separation of the sheep from the goats which showed Bryan exactly where he stood with the administration Democrats and with the Populists. Furthermore, because the national senate contained forty-four Republicans, forty-four Democrats and five Populists who might work with the Democrats, the political complexion of the next senator from Nebraska might be a decisive factor in the balance of power in that body.<sup>3</sup>

When Bryan arrived in Nebraska on December 24 the skirmishing preliminary to the election had already begun. No party, for the first time in Nebraska's history, had a majority in either house of the legislature: the Republicans

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<sup>2</sup> Facts and conclusions appearing so far are drawn from the manuscript of a full-length biography of Bryan being prepared by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Robert McElroy, *Grover Cleveland, the Man and Statesman* (New York, 1923), II, 2.



held fifty-three seats, the Democrats seventeen, and the Populists fifty-three. The major topic of discussion during December, 1892, and January, 1893, naturally revolved about the organization of the legislature. The Republicans immediately attempted to throw out enough duly elected Populists to insure the election of a Republican, a scheme quickly exposed by Gilbert M. Hitchcock and Richard L. Metcalfe, who argued that there was no reason why the Democrats and Populists should not get together and make an agreement whereby the legislature should be organized by them and kept out of the hands of the Republicans and the corporations.<sup>4</sup> Only after several weeks of conferences did the Democrats and Populists agree; joining forces, they divided the legislative offices and organized the legislature.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile at least a dozen candidates had appeared. By early December there had gathered "more seventh sons of the seventh politician to the square inch" than had ever assembled in Lincoln before. Morton looked at the senatorship as a possible stepping stone to a cabinet post, an ambition ridiculed by the Republican press.<sup>6</sup> Former Governor Boyd, avid for the senatorship, had drawn many Populists as well as Democrats about him by exposing frauds in the administration of the state asylum during the closing days of the year. He had money to spend, kept open house at two hotels, and bragged that he was the choice of the Democratic National Committee.<sup>7</sup> The leading Populist contender was the plainly clothed and plain-spoken leader of the State Farmers' Alliance, John Holbrook Powers.<sup>8</sup> Several other

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<sup>4</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, November 18, December 26, 1892. Gilbert M. Hitchcock was the editor and owner of this newspaper and Richard L. Metcalfe its exceedingly capable political editorial writer.

<sup>5</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, January 11, 1893; Addison E. Sheldon, "Nebraskans I have Known, I, W. V. Allen," *Nebraska History*, XIX (July-September 1938), 195.

<sup>6</sup> *Omaha Bee*, December 10, 1892.

<sup>7</sup> T. S. Allen, T. D. Worrall to Bryan, January 13, 1893, Bryan Papers, Library of Congress, (Unless otherwise indicated, all Mss. cited are from this collection.)

<sup>8</sup> Addison E. Sheldon, "Nebraskans I have Known, II, John Holbrook Powers," *Nebraska History*, XIX (October-December, 1939), 333.

Populists, like Joseph "Our Joe" Edgerton had little prospect of success, but the chances of William McKeighan, "the homeliest man in the Populist Party," looked good. Three Republicans—Governor Crounse, Lieutenant Governor Thomas Majors and the Union Pacific's general solicitor, John M. Thurston—pushed forward even though the Republican incumbent, Algernon S. Paddock, sought re-election. It was suspected that Majors would throw his strength to Crounse, for if the Governor were elected senator Majors himself would become governor. Bryan, the only silver Democrat, was known to have a host of friends both Democratic and Populist and was expected to figure prominently in the contest. As early as the middle of November Edward Rosewater had stated that Bryan had given it out "cold" that he wanted the senatorship.<sup>9</sup>

The election depended upon the successful fusion of either major party with the Populists. Although unable to agree upon a candidate of their own the Republicans nevertheless stridently insisted that the Populists join them. The Democrats were split into two camps: one, led by the state leaders, wanted the Republicans to come over and help elect either Morton or Boyd; the silver wing asked the Populists to support Bryan. But in addition to those Democrats who opposed Bryan because he was a silver man there were others who would reject him because his election would leave the First district a walkaway for a Republican.<sup>10</sup> There were still others who mentioned Judge J. H. Broady as an excellent compromise candidate if the Democrats and Populists could not agree upon Bryan.<sup>11</sup> Yet

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<sup>9</sup> *Omaha Bee*, November 19, 1892.

<sup>10</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, December 7, 1892.

<sup>11</sup> Broady, a distinguished lawyer, believed in holding corporations to the strict letter and spirit of their promises. He was also a somewhat absentminded booklover. One day he left his office for lunch and hung up a sign, "Gone to lunch; will be back in fifteen minutes." Several hours later he was seen reading a book before his office door. "What are you sitting here for, Judge?" asked a fellow lawyer. Broady glanced hastily at the door and replied, "Goodness gracious! This is my own office and here I have been waiting for myself to come back . . . from lunch."—*Chicago Herald*, quoted in *Omaha World-Herald*, December 22, 1892.

Bryan's appeal went beyond Nebraska to the entire Northwest. Such a young man as he, argued the *Kansas City Times*, was needed to represent the Northwest in the senate, where there was not a single Democrat from the Upper Mississippi Valley. He was acceptable to most of the Populists in his State and would get many Populist votes because he had forced tariff reform and the issue of free silver coinage at every opening. The "handsome, manly and eloquent youth" who had stirred to emulation all of the Young Democracy of the West would prove a forceful advocate of practical reforms, and the Democrats of Missouri and Kansas, as well as of Nebraska, were interested in his success. Furthermore, no other man could be elected so readily: agreement between the Democrats and Populists would easily crush any Republican conspiracy and send him to the Senate.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Hitchcock revealed two little political acorns from which oaks of considerable size might grow. The Populists of Bryan's district could help him and he in turn could help them elect one of their own to Congress. Some Republicans, also, favored his promotion because in this way they could get rid of him and give a Republican a fighting chance in the First.<sup>13</sup>

With the necessary strategy so clearly outlined one would have expected Democratic-Populist fusion immediately following the organization of the legislature. Instead the Populists hewed strictly to the party line during several weeks of balloting. The Republicans did likewise. One would think, too, that with Democratic success dependent upon Democratic unity and a deadlock between the Republicans and Populists that the Democrats would stand firm. But they refused to learn from lessons of the past and scattered their votes for half a dozen candidates, with Morton and Bryan in the van. The result was that Morton and Boyd fought each other with such virulence that all hope for Democratic harmony disappeared and both fought

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<sup>12</sup> *Kansas City Times*, quoted in *Omaha World-Herald*, December 22, 1892. See also *Omaha World-Herald*, December 7, 1892.

<sup>13</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, December 31, 1892.

against Bryan so savagely that the contest became "a spectacle for the gods."<sup>14</sup> When H. M. Boydston of Nebraska City complained to Bryan that "the stuffed Buzzard of Arbor Lodge" had quashed his application for the local postmastership Bryan saw clearly that Morton was damaging his cause by knifing those loyal to him.<sup>15</sup> It was useless for others to complain to him that they wished that the "chronic bourbon" who lived in an age of "fossil representation and monopoly chicanery" be sent to the discard.<sup>16</sup> Bryan had nothing with which to lift the heavy hand of the Sage from the patronage counter.

Control over the patronage was the juicy bone over which the political dogs barked and snapped. Bryan remained aloof as the fur flew. No sooner had Dr. George L. Miller stated that he wanted nothing to do with the patronage and reiterated his intention of staying out of politics than he wrote Bryan suggesting the organization of a combination to control the patronage. Bryan flashed back to the effect that he would engage in no political trickery. "The Democracy does not need leaders so much as followers," he told him.<sup>17</sup> Bryan's curt rejoinder stemmed not only from his desire to keep aloof from entangling alliances with gold Democrats but from his knowledge that he would have no patronage to control. Whether it was also responsible for Miller's renewed decision, publicly stated, to retire from politics,<sup>18</sup> is unknown. At any rate, with Miller out of the way, the field on the Democratic side narrowed down to Morton, Boyd, and Bryan, with Castor and Martin siding with the Sage and the former Governor against the Youth Eloquent. But the combination suggested by Miller was made, without Bryan's knowledge or blessing, and to his loss. Tobe Castor, for one, did not want Bryan, Broady, McKeighan or anyone else elected who might ask for or be

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<sup>14</sup> *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), January 9, 1893.

<sup>15</sup> Boydston to Bryan, January 13, 1893.

<sup>16</sup> Clinton Furbish to Bryan, January 3, 1893; L. A. Dunphy to Bryan, January 5, 1893.

<sup>17</sup> Bryan to Miller, December 2, 1892.

<sup>18</sup> *Omaha Bee*, December 2, 1892.

tendered a share in the distribution of pie. On the other hand the election of a Republican would discredit him as national committeeman. Therefore he preferred Powers or some other Populist who would not disturb the patronage. Morton's disclaimer to participation in such a combination was considered by Bryan's supporters as merely an addition to "his other villainies."<sup>19</sup>

By the middle of January the necessary Democratic-Populist combination in the legislature itself was being stopped cold by five gold Democrats who absolutely refused to vote with the Populists, the same five who had refused to vote with the Populists in order to organize the senate.<sup>20</sup> A "hot wave" which hit them from Democrats throughout the state failed to move them to co-operation, and when the balloting began they continued, ostensibly at the instigation of Boyd and Morton, to vote independently and to make any Democratic-Populist selection impossible.<sup>21</sup> These five Judases, Bryan was told, were lumps of clay being molded by the dextrous, golden fingers of Morton and Boyd.<sup>22</sup>

Bryan remained in Lincoln as long as he could—until January 10—catching the last possible train which would get him to Washington before his leave expired. Undoubtedly he enjoyed more prestige in Populist circles than any other Democrat and probably ranked after Powers and McKeighan as the Populist choice. In frequent consultations with Populist leaders he had told them frankly that he alone was the only man in the state who stood a ghost of a chance of being elected by fusion and that he alone could be considered a compromise candidate.<sup>23</sup> The Republicans continuously spread calumnies against him and the Populists. McKeighan and Kem, they said, who controlled the Populist strength in the legislature, had arranged to boom McKeighan for the senatorship; Kem, defying Bryan, Boyd, Morton and all the rest, would throw the

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<sup>19</sup> J. D. Calhoun to Bryan, January 10, 1893.

<sup>20</sup> N. W. Smails to Bryan, January 11, 1893.

<sup>21</sup> T. S. Allen, T. D. Worrall to Bryan, February 3, 1893

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Omaha Bee*, November 21, 1892.

members from the Sixth to McKeighan. Bryan, meanwhile, was supposed to be proceeding on the theory that, being the only Democratic congressman in the state, he could use the patronage as "trading property." He was thought to have made a bargain with McKeighan by which, in return for McKeighan's help in "inveigling" the Populists in the senate to vote for him, McKeighan would get the job of patronage distributor, "with permission to make all he can out of it."<sup>24</sup>

While missing the boat on this point, the Republicans nevertheless saw the problems facing Bryan with unique perspicacity. He was too honest to "make a trade" and therefore would not offer the Populists any patronage in return for their aid. Against him, furthermore, were the entire Democratic state machine, the Republican organization, and the small number of obstinate and highly articulate middle-of-the-road Populists.<sup>25</sup> The patronage upon which he was supposed to depend, moreover, was by no means assured. As he left for Washington the Republicans jeered that "the dictator of the Nebraska democracy" had been sorely disappointed because the Democrats of the state had "absolutely refused" to follow his orders.<sup>26</sup> If worse came to worst, they jibed, a Democrat or a Populist should be elected, but Bryan should be allowed "to retire with his curtailed congressional laurels."<sup>27</sup>

In his absence Bryan was kept informed of the status of the senatorial contest in almost daily letters penned by Thomas Stinson Allen. Allen's political insight was keen, and he advised Bryan to prepare for a long contest and to write letters to Democrats living in districts which had returned Populist members to the legislature in which he should urge them to exert pressure upon those members.<sup>28</sup> Bryan sent Allen \$350 but wrote few letters, either because he realized that his cause was hopeless or because he was

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, November 11, 1892.

<sup>25</sup> H. M. Boydston to Bryan, January 13, T. R. Mayes to Bryan, January 19, 1893.

<sup>26</sup> *Nebraska State Journal*, January 5, 1893.

<sup>27</sup> *Nebraska City Press*, quoted in *Nebraska State Journal*, January 5, 1893.

<sup>28</sup> T. S. Allen to Bryan, January 13, 20, 21, 1893.

too involved in the silver battle in Congress to devote time to local politics. By the end of January he knew that his chances were poor, for, while of the thirteen votes cast in a private Democratic caucus on January 14 he had received seven as against three for Boyd and three for Morton,<sup>29</sup> on the first ballot cast in the legislature, on January 17, Paddock had received thirty-three and he and Morton only three each.<sup>30</sup> Then Morton was shoved out of the picture by the Union Pacific's Thurston, who convinced him that only a man who was favored by the Union Pacific could be elected—and the Father of Arbor Day was a Burlington man. But at least Democratic-Republican fusion was rendered impossible.<sup>31</sup> On the ballot taken on January 20, Powers' strength increased to fifty-four while Bryan's dropped to one and Morton's disappeared altogether.<sup>32</sup> That night a Populist caucus voted solidly for Powers and against any combination.<sup>33</sup> While the Republicans were suspected of attempting to buy enough Democratic and Populist votes to elect Paddock, whose election would be facilitated by the unseating of certain members of the legislature by the Committee on Elections, safely Republican,<sup>34</sup> Thurston very unexpectedly withdrew from the race and threw his support to Paddock, a move which led to endless discussion and confusion. His withdrawal, however, T. S. Allen assured Bryan, would not insure unity in the Republican camp.<sup>35</sup> John D. Calhoun, with greater prophetic insight, wrote Bryan that Thurston, "having made hay" at this time, would come back stronger than ever two years hence.<sup>36</sup> As it transpired, Thurston's cohorts refused to support Paddock, thus sustaining Allen's conclusion, and left the Republican side disunited. So muddled, too, was the situation in the

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<sup>29</sup> N. W. Smalls to Bryan, January 15, 1893.

<sup>30</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, January 19, 1893. The vote was Paddock 33, Thurston 4, Edgerton 5, Powers 27, Majors 7, Morton 3, and Bryan 3.

<sup>31</sup> J. G. Dundas to Bryan, January 19, 1893; James C. Olson, *J. Sterling Morton* (Lincoln, 1942), pp. 350-51.

<sup>32</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, January 21, 1893.

<sup>33</sup> T. S. Allen to Bryan, January 20, 1893.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, January 21, 1893.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, January 23, 1893.

<sup>36</sup> Calhoun to Bryan, January 23, 1893.

Populist ranks that McKeighan packed and returned to Washington.<sup>37</sup>

After two weeks of balloting in the legislature Bryan's friends concluded that Morton and his crew were political devils and the Populist brethren their fit companions. James Devenny, chairman of the Johnson County Democratic committee, wrote Bryan from Tecumseh:

The conduct of the Arbor Lodge Statesman is condemned by every loyal democrat as there can be no fellowship between a good democrat and Republicanism. I understand that the Statesman [has said that] he would rather vote for a Republican than Bryan. I will say to you that the best democracy in Nebraska is with W. J. Bryan and I will say that you keep right on the course you have taken and you will be in front when the gentleman that is fighting you will be Burried [sic] too deep for Gabriel's Trumpet to resurrect.<sup>38</sup>

"It is certainly alarming," reasoned H. M. Boydston, "when the leader of the party, for purely personal reasons, and for self-advancement, will try and deliver us bodily into the hands of the enemy. . . . He has kept the party divided for twenty years, and now, just at a time when the old warring factions are about to retire from politics, he opens a fight between young Democracy, which has been looked upon as the only hope of the Nebraska Democracy."<sup>39</sup> John D. Calhoun, editor of the *Lincoln Herald*, the only newspaper in the First District which supported Bryan for senator, confessed to Bryan that the situation was "horribly muddled":

Back of the candidacy of sundry democrats lies a jealousy of you, and it has been decreed that you are not to be elected. I am told that you would lack six democrats at the pinch—but that you will not be allowed to have the 'pinch'.

There are some democrats who want McKeighan and they are in effect as much in the way as Morton, Boyd, Castor, et. al. They deem the opposition of these men is fatal to you and that you have no show, so they go in for McKeighan. . . .

The main trouble is that the Big Chiefs are against you, and the multitude that is for you has neither time nor money to spend in the lobby. It seems to me that here might be a time where you should declare for an Independent . . . and put the responsibility of the appointment or election of a republican where it belongs.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> T. S. Allen to Bryan, January 26, 1893.

<sup>38</sup> Devenny to Bryan, January 21, 1893.

<sup>39</sup> Boydston to Bryan, January 25, 1893.

<sup>40</sup> Calhoun to Bryan, January 23, 1893.



Opposition from the big chiefs at least earned Bryan some Populist sympathy, but fear that the Republicans might still succeed in buying enough Populist votes would not down.<sup>41</sup> T. S. Allen and others repeated the belief that Bryan would be the first choice of the Populists "if" they ever came over to a Democrat, but by the beginning of February it was bruited about that no election would occur and that the Republican governor would have to make an appointment.<sup>42</sup> Bryan was advised to strike now if he were to strike at all: either he should write the necessary letters, get someone to work for him in the legislature, or continue unhappily in the middle of the road for the rest of the legislative session. Every day's delay gave the Republicans additional opportunity to perfect their cunning. The death of one Populist member had lowered the Democratic-Populist majority in the legislature to four: now only three corrupt or merely stubborn men could prevent his election.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, a happy sign had appeared in an increase of Bryan's strength in the balloting. On the ballot taken on January 28 Powers still led with forty-four while Bryan's strength had increased from three to eight—but this would be the highest number he would ever receive.<sup>44</sup> Unless Bryan struck now, unless a master mind took the Democratic legislators in hand, wrote a supporter to Bryan, the Morton element would "wink at the culmination of republican success."<sup>45</sup> T. S. Allen simultaneously reported danger from another quarter, a "combine" between the Republicans and Populists which would result in the election of a Republican.<sup>46</sup> In the Republican caucus held on January 31, however, the last ballot gave Thurston twenty-eight and Paddock twenty-one, revealing that things in the GOP camp were still "horribly muddled."

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<sup>41</sup> G. W. Hopkins to Bryan, January 23, 1893.

<sup>42</sup> T. S. Allen, Geo. A. Abbott, J. F. Hale to Bryan, January 28, 1893

<sup>43</sup> T. S. Allen, Geo. A. Abbott to Bryan, January 28, 1893.

<sup>44</sup> T. S. Allen to Bryan, January 28, 1893.

<sup>45</sup> John L. Cleaver to Bryan, January 29, 1893.

<sup>46</sup> T. S. Allen to Bryan, January 30, 1893.

Three days later Bryan's hope for election disappeared when a Populist caucus dropped Powers and selected William V. Allen as the party's candidate. William V. Allen—no relation to Thomas Stinson Allen—had voted for Tilden in 1876, had been an unsuccessful congressional candidate on a combination Independent-Republican ticket in the Eighties, and had been a Republican until the election of 1890, when he became a Populist. So quickly did he rise in the new party that in 1892 he was made president of the Populist state convention. Bryan and Allen were friends, and when Bryan learned of the new development he, ably seconded by Calhoun and Hitchcock, strenuously urged the Democrats in the legislature to vote for Allen and thereby keep Nebraska safe from the railroad power. Boyd flared up. His control over the gold Democrats in the legislature, he said, enabled him to elect or defeat Allen, and he also stated that he had a written agreement in which Allen promised him the distribution of the patronage if elected. Allen immediately denied this and offered Boyd five thousand dollars if he could produce the written agreement. Of course Boyd could not. He should have known, furthermore, that as a Populist Allen could expect no patronage from the incoming Democratic administration headed by Cleveland.<sup>47</sup>

Allen's candidacy drove the Republicans to a last effort to elect Morton, but the fiery Rosewater invaded a party caucus and successfully broke up any possible move in the direction of such a combination.<sup>48</sup> Then, on February 6, the obdurate five gold Democrats announced that unless enough Republicans agreed to assist in the election of either Boyd or Morton they would vote for Allen.<sup>49</sup> Their decision was announced almost at the same time that the Democratic National Committee, in a telegram to the Democratic mem-

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<sup>47</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, February 4, 5, 1893; *Omaha Bee*, February 14, 1893; Mittie Young Scott, "Life and Political Career of William V. Allen," (Ms. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1927), pp. 1-13.

<sup>48</sup> Sheldon, "W. V. Allen," Loc. cit.

<sup>49</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, February 7, 1893.

bers of the state legislature, urged them to vote for Allen. Calvin S. Brice, Arthur P. Gorman and John G. Carlisle, the signatories of the telegram, reasoned that only in this way would the Senate be saved from the Republicans. Far from stipulating whom should be chosen, however, the national committeemen merely said they would be satisfied with any anti-Republican, thereby giving Morton and Boyd renewed excuse to batter each other hammer and tongs in the hope of ingratiating themselves with Cleveland. In the last ditch, however, Boyd promised to support Morton in order to prevent the election of a Populist. Dr. Miller, too, preferred a Populist if there was "no show" for a Democrat.<sup>50</sup> For a short time the refusal of the five gold Democrats to follow the suggestion of the National Committee improved Bryan's chances as a compromise candidate. Perhaps thirty of the fifty-two Populist members of the legislature favored him, and another dozen could be persuaded to vote for him, but the middle-of-the-road men proved as headstrong as the obdurate Democrats. "The general feeling now," wrote T. S. Allen to Bryan, "is among Independents that you will be the most available man in '95 unless they have a clear majority without Democratic help."<sup>51</sup> Bryan's chances, in other words, were absolutely hopeless.

It took innumerable ballots, spread over a two week period, for the deadlock to be broken: on February 7 Allen received all the Populist and Democratic votes and was elected.<sup>52</sup> Bryan was among the first to send Allen congratulations.

The Populists of Nebraska realized that Bryan's influence with the eleven Democrats in the legislature who

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<sup>50</sup> T. S. Allen to Bryan, February 4, 1893; W. S. Shoemaker to Bryan, February 12, 1893.

<sup>51</sup> T. S. Allen to Bryan, February 4, 1893.

<sup>52</sup> Jesse E. Boell, "William Jennings Bryan before 1896," (Ms. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1929), pp. 107-08; Fred E. Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War, with Special Reference to Iowa* (Iowa City, Iowa, 1916), p. 272; J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1913), III, 42; Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

had voted consistently with them had in great part been responsible for Allen's success, and their store of good will for Bryan increased. He, Allen, Kem. and McKeighan were expected to obtain for the Populists a "fair share" of the patronage.<sup>53</sup> Allen, being an honest man and an appreciative one, felt under obligation to Bryan and said he would find ways in which to discharge that obligation. Allen was the first and only Populist United States Senator from Nebraska and the first Senator from Nebraska who was not a Republican. He stood directly upon the Omaha platform—land, currency and transportation reform—and was regarded as a strong accession to the silver forces in the Senate. He was an incorruptible lawyer who had won renown as an attorney, and an upright judge, one whose acts of kindness and charity were legion. He was a strong man, somewhat larger in stature than Bryan, and like him clean shaven and impressive in face, voice, and bearing. He had the enthusiastic support of those Democrats who were friendly to Bryan as well as the whole-hearted support of the Populists.<sup>54</sup> Allen and Bryan liked each other and promised to co-operate heartily in both state and national affairs. But the administration Democrats found in Bryan's support of Allen another reason for marking him for slaughter.

The choice of Allen rather than Bryan as senator had resulted from a painstaking and realistic study of the situation by the Democratic silver-wing and Populist leaders of the state and by the throwing of a sufficient number of Bryan votes to Allen to elect him. One faction of the Democratic membership in the legislature would have none other than Morton, another none other than Boyd. Eleven Bryan men would have neither. The Republicans needed so few Populist votes to elect their candidate that the Democratic-Populist leaders refused to take a chance with Bryan, for

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<sup>53</sup> W. H. Thompson to Bryan, February 8, 1893; T. F. Barnes to Bryan, February 13, 1893.

<sup>54</sup> B. F. Diffenbacher to Bryan, February 8, 1893; C. D. Casper to Bryan, February 18, 1893; Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 273; Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19; Addison E. Sheldon, *History of Nebraska* (Chicago, 1931), I, 724.



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A. S. Paddock

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J. Sterling Morton



James E. Boyd



whom the gold Democrats and middle-of-the-road Populists would not vote. There was only one thing left to do—permit the Republicans to elect their man or join the Populists and elect Allen. Allen's expressions of friendliness for Bryan had made the choice between the two men a difficult one to make, but Bryan's followers would have to rest content with knowing that Bryan's influence had made Allen's election possible. Furthermore, Allen had pledged before a Democratic caucus that he would stand by Bryan on patronage and free silver coinage. He also had agreed to organize senatorial opposition to Cleveland if the President attempted to coerce Bryan because of his silver views.

In the light of these facts the claims of Boyd and Morton to the effect that each, independently, had made possible the combination which had elected Allen were deemed mere lies by the silver Democrats and the Populists.<sup>55</sup> Whether either Morton or Boyd could control the patronage remained to be seen. Indeed, the entire legislative squabble appeared to be more of a fight over who should be allowed to gorge at the pie counter than who should be elected senator.<sup>56</sup> When Boyd requested Allen to make him the chief dispenser of patronage in Nebraska the request was regarded as "enough to make a mule laugh," but the capabilities of the former Governor could not altogether be smiled away: his advice, reluctantly given to the equally reluctant gold Democrats to vote for Allen was judged by the Republicans at least as sufficient to have earned him the distribution of the patronage at the hands of the new administration.<sup>57</sup> "Truthful Jeems," as Boyd was called occasionally, went happily about gathering what glory he could by saying that the Brice-Gorman-Carlisle telegram had been sent at his special request.<sup>58</sup>

Cleveland immediately rewarded the Democrat who had fought Bryan and the Populists most forcefully and

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<sup>55</sup> T. S. Allen, C. D. Casper, T. D. Worrall to Bryan, February 8, 1893; N. W. Smails to Bryan, February 14, 1893.

<sup>56</sup> W. H. Thompson to Bryan, February 9, 1893.

<sup>57</sup> John L. Cleaver to Bryan, February 8, 1893; T. D. Worrall to Bryan, February 9, 1893.

<sup>58</sup> Charles H. Brown to Bryan, February 11, 1893.

consistently by telegraphing Morton, in February 15, to come to Lakewood, New Jersey. There, two days later, Morton was tendered and accepted the post of Secretary of Agriculture.<sup>59</sup> Morton tersely declared that he did not care to complicate his labors in the vineyard with the business of "pap brokerage." All eyes not fixed hopefully upon Bryan thenceforth turned—and with greater results in the end—to Tobias Castor, the national committeeman; to Euclid Martin, chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee; and to Boyd.

In a way the senatorial election was merely water under the bridge so far as Bryan was concerned. T. S. Allen had spent only about eighty of the three hundred fifty dollars sent him, and a number of letters written for distribution by Allen were never mailed.<sup>60</sup> Several men indicated their loyalty by returning money forwarded them, stating that they would never let him pay their expenses.<sup>61</sup> He was satisfied with the election of W. V. Allen, whom he knew would co-operate in patronage matters and support him in his fight for free silver. Furthermore, plans were already in the wind by which he could become a United States Senator in 1895 in one of two ways—either by direct election by a combined Democratic-Populist vote in the legislature which met in January, 1895, or by election as governor with a Populist lieutenant governor in the fall of 1894. In the latter case the Populists could have one of their own kind as governor by sending Governor Bryan to the senate.<sup>62</sup>

In the long run, however, Bryan lost more than he gained in his first campaign for the Senate. The struggle strengthened his determination that senators should be elected directly by the people and bulwarked his lifelong conviction that office should not be purchased at the price of

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<sup>59</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, February 18, 1893; McElroy, *op. cit.*, II, 6; Olson, *op. cit.*, pp. 351-52.

<sup>60</sup> T. S. Allen to Bryan, February 8, 1893.

<sup>61</sup> See Geo. A. Abbott to Bryan, February 10, 1893.

<sup>62</sup> W. S. Shoemaker to Bryan, February 12, 25, 1893; J. W. Farrell to Bryan, February 13, 1893; J. S. Kittle to Bryan, February 15, 1893; John L. Cleaver to Bryan, February 20, 1893.

overthrowing principle: despite his failure he refused to yield tot or tittle of his sincerity in his fight for free silver even though he realized that his stand would cause Cleveland to add to his already overrunning cup of grievances against him. Cleveland, by appointing Morton to the cabinet, had revealed himself ready to shore up the crumbling foundation which the gold standard provided for the nation's finances; Bryan, by aiding Allen, had gained an ally in the crusade against the yellow metal and had given the Populists another reason for being kind to him in the future. This could aid him only in the long run. Since so much, however, seemed to depend upon the dispensation of the patronage, the election put him at a disadvantage because the administration could not be expected to open the door to the patronage locker to a silver man who was a fusionist to boot. Had he been in Lincoln instead of in Washington fighting for free silver and against gold bonds he could have carried on the personal button-holing type of campaign which he had found so successful in the past, or he could have listened to Thomas Allen and spent money freely (had he had any) and put the necessary pressure upon the wavering brethren and thus carried the legislature. His decision to leave Lincoln for Washington was his own responsibility. The actions of two groups certainly gave him reason for pause. The middle-of-the-road Populists would be a definite stumbling block to attempts at fusion in the future. Second, and more important, the stand taken by the gold men revealed that his hopes for the future rested upon one, and only one chance—if he could wean enough Democratic strength away from the administration and join it to the Populist support which he enjoyed he might become the master of the Nebraska political situation. If he failed, his name would be mud unless he could convince the nation at large that he represented the interests of all America better than did Grover Cleveland.