



William Jennings Bryan's Second Congressional Campaign

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Article Summary: The controversial nomination of William Jennings Bryan during the 1892 congressional election is recapped here. The controversy began almost immediately, with the various papers calling names and crying foul.

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Names: Charles H Gere, Edward Rosewater, Andrew Jackson Sawyer, Gilbert M Hitchcock, William H Thompson, Tobias Castor, James E Boyd, Joseph Ong, Allen W Field, William McKinley, Jefferson H Broady, Charles H Van Wyck, Jerome Shamp, Thomas Stinson Allen, William A McKeighan, Omar M Kem, William Annin, J Sterling Morton, George L Miller, Euclid Martin, Charles F Peck, James B Weaver, Joseph Foraker, John L Webster

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Photographs / Images: Portraits: William Jennings Bryan; Allen W Field

WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN'S SECOND CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN

BY PAOLO E. COLETTA

AS JUNE 20, 1892, the day set for the First Congressional District convention, approached, it was apparent that the meeting would be "exclusively and unanimately Billy Bryan's affair" from primaries to platform. The Lancaster County primary convention renominated him by acclamation but not without some criticism. Editor Charles H. Gere, of the *Nebraska State Journal*, said that he represented the "industry-destroying interests of Nebraska in Congress" and was a wild beater of the calamity tom-tom, and Edward Rosewater, editor of the *Omaha Bee*, said that "Windy Jay" Bryan was the greatest joke of the season, a roaring farce.¹ Andrew Jackson Sawyer, spokes-

¹ *Nebraska State Journal*, May 15, June 17, 19, 1892; *The Omaha Daily Bee*, June 17, 1892; Bryan's opposition to bounties extended to those provided the new sugar beet factories of Nebraska, and he was instrumental both in preventing the issue of precinct bonds to furnish bounties and in the repeal of the state bounty law. In Congress, he supported free wool and opposed bounties to binding twine factories. Thus he gained the enmity of Nebraska's sugar beet growers; sugar beet factory owners at Grand Island, Norfolk, and Ames; wool producers; and the binding twine operatives near Fremont. Rosewater referred particularly to Bryan's speeches against William McKinley, father of the tariff law of 1890.

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man for the conservative Democrats, believed that Bryan was following the silver policy in order to win some of the Populist vote and said he would soon find that a silver platform provided uncertain footing. Then, like all "right thinking" Democrats, he would come around to a "sensible" view of the money question. And editor Gilbert M. Hitchcock, of the Omaha *World-Herald*, asserted that Bryan's attempt to fuse the Democratic and Populist parties as such would drive votes to the Republicans. Moreover, the outcome of the national convention, which would convene in Chicago on June 22, could have an important bearing on Bryan's future.

The Nebraska delegation to Chicago met on June 20 and produced a surprise. It had been assumed that Governor James E. Boyd would be elected chairman of the delegation and Judge Joseph Ong, a Bryan supporter, the new member of the national committee. Instead, Bryan's friend, William H. Thompson, of Grand Island, was elected head of the delegation and Tobias "Toburlington" Castor the committeeman. Thompson's work would be accomplished with the end of the convention, but Castor would be committeeman for four years, and he supported Grover Cleveland and gold and opposed Bryan and silver. The surprise in Chicago had no immediate effect upon Bryan, who was unanimously renominated on a platform containing a somewhat weaker silver plank than that of 1890,² and then immediately entrained for Chicago, where he failed to interest the delegates in nominating Horace Boies instead of Cleveland. The nomination of Cleveland drove him as far

² Paolo E. Coletta, "The Morning Star of the Reformation: William Jennings Bryan's First Congressional Campaign," *Nebraska History*, XXXVII (June 1956), 103-119. In the Democratic state convention of 1891 Bryan had forced the silver fight but had accepted a compromise plank that called for free but not unlimited silver coinage. In the House, in the spring of 1892, he had backed the attempt of Richard Parks Bland to push through a free silver bill. In the Democratic state convention of April 13-14, 1892, he had fought mightily for silver but had been overwhelmed by conservative Democrats like J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins. Paolo E. Coletta, "The Nebraska Democratic State Convention of April 13-14, 1892," *Nebraska History*, XXXIX (December, 1958), 317-333.

to the edge of his party as he could go without toppling over into Populism.

As soon as Congress adjourned, on August 5, Bryan rushed home to rebuild fortunes depleted by Republican raids. A week earlier the Republicans had chosen his opponent, Judge Allen W. Field. Not yet forty (Bryan was only thirty-two), Field had been a district judge since 1887 and had served two terms in the legislature, the second as Speaker of the House. Since Field was a Lincoln man, Bryan would have a contest for the relatively heavy city vote and would therefore have to depend heavily upon the farmers of his district, particularly since Field was supported both by the *Nebraska State Journal* and the *Omaha Bee*. Rosewater, chosen national committeeman and one of the five men who directed the Republican campaign from its western headquarters in Chicago, had reached the height of his power and asserted that "any good man ought to beat Bryan, and Judge Field should have no trouble."³ Recently, too, William McKinley had spoken in Beatrice, Lincoln, and Omaha, and tried to prove that everything Bryan said about tariff protection was false. He told twenty thousand persons in Omaha, for instance, that his own tariff act had *not* raised prices for consumers. Bryan said he would enjoy refuting McKinley, and when the Democratic State Central Committee invited him to reply to McKinley's Lincoln speech, he eagerly accepted. Meantime, although he refused all offers to debate, he was not inactive—while he refused to speak in support of Cleveland, he spoke on tariff reform and free silver, and he wrote letters to the Young Democrats of the state and sowed public documents "in ten-bushel handfuls." He refused to debate because his campaign manager, Jefferson H. Broady, told him that the Republicans, fearful of putting Field on the stump, would wear him out in debates with Republicans who were not candidates and therefore had nothing to lose if he defeated them, thus leaving Field to stump unopposed.⁴

³ *The Omaha Daily Bee*, July 30, 1892.

⁴ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, August 24, 1892.

State conventions normally called for June or July were postponed until August in 1892. The Republicans and Populists met during the first week and selected Lorenzo Crounse and Charles H. Van Wyck their respective gubernatorial candidates. According to the Republicans, the Democrats needed more time to settle the vital question of whether to fuse or to refuse to fuse—but the Democratic State Committee said nothing about fusion and on August 11 set the date for their convention for August 30 and announced that the main speakers would be Bryan and the Democratic vice presidential candidate, Adlai Stevenson. Boyd's refusal to seek re-election added zest to what already promised to be an interesting convention.⁵

Suspicion that the calling of the First District Populist convention awaited the settlement of fusion was accomplished by allegations that Bryan and Van Wyck had arranged to trade Democratic for Populist votes in the district, that certain Populist leaders in that district wanted to turn their party directly over to Bryan, and that they were deliberately holding up a nomination so that whoever was named would have insufficient time to make an effective campaign against Bryan. Only fear that fusion would drive many Democrats and Populists to vote for Field prevented a merger of these forces. Then, when Jerome Shamp was named, on August 11, Gere accused Thomas Stinson Allen, Bryan's campaign secretary, of having tried to scare Shamp out by saying he would be in Bryan's way and cause trouble all around, and that Bryan, Kem, and McKeighan⁶ had arranged for the interchanging of Democratic and Populist votes, as necessary, on a statewide level. That fusion was not in the cards, however, was proved when the Populist delegates gave Shamp sixty votes, another Popu-

⁵ *Nebraska State Journal*, August 13, 1892; *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, August 23, 1892. Governor Boyd's veto of the Newberry railroad regulation bill had lost him so much support that he was quite openly repudiated in the Democratic state convention of April 13-14, 1892.

⁶ William A. McKeighan and Omar M. Kem were the other two Nebraska Congressmen, a Democrat-Populist and a Populist, respectively.

list candidate twenty-two, and Bryan only twelve. In his acceptance speech, Shamp, a former Republican member of the state legislature, made the first of a series of mistakes by saying that he would always advocate "Republican principles." Field emphasized his confidence of election next day by resigning from the bench.

Bryan faced many difficulties. He was in a three-cornered contest, and all indications pointed to an increased Populist vote in 1892 compared with 1890. The reapportionment of districts following the census of 1890 made his election impossible unless several thousand Populists voted for him rather than for Shamp. In 1890, he had received 5,595 of his 6,713 votes from Douglas County. The reorganized First District now excluded Omaha, in Douglas County, and contained only seven of its original counties—Lancaster, Otoe, Pawnee, Cass, Richardson, Johnson, and Nemaha—of which he had lost three—Lancaster, Johnson, and Nemaha—in 1890. The four he had carried in 1890 gave him a plurality of only 519 for the new district. In 1890 perhaps a thousand Republicans in Lincoln alone had voted for him, the local man, rather than for William J. Connell, of Omaha; now they would swing to Field. Since party strength in the new First was about 13,000 Republican, 10,000 Democratic, and 8,000 Populist, it was evident that his re-election depended upon Populist votes, and his reason for countenancing fusion is amply evident.

Bryan counted on winning Populist votes on two grounds, his personal popularity and his record on the money question. How the election would have been affected had the news that he had sent Broady into the Rocky Mountain states to collect campaign funds from the silver miners is a moot point, for it was not until December 10, 1893 that William Annin, a reporter for the *Nebraska State Journal*, "spilled the beans" about the "passing of the corn popper." At any rate, Broady collected about \$2,000 in Colorado and a similar sum in other states. Bryan made no written acknowledgments and thanked his benefactors

as he met them after the campaign, in person.⁷ Other funds came as voluntary contributions from supporters throughout the state, and some men like Jim Dahlman came from western Nebraska to eastern Nebraska to campaign for him at their own expense.

J. Sterling Morton, the leading aspirant for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, had supported Bryan in 1890, but a change of friendships among the Democratic state leaders in the spring of 1892 boded ill for Bryan. Until he became national committeeman, Tobias Castor had supported the Dr. George L. Miller-Boyd faction against Morton; now he became one of Morton's closest allies. Euclid Martin, of Omaha, the new state chairman, was a gold man, too, and promised to co-operate with Morton and Castor in supporting Cleveland and strengthening party solidarity in the state. The only man who could challenge that solidarity and back up the challenge with a claim to a share of the patronage was Bryan, the state's only Democratic congressman. Should Bryan seek to use the patronage to influence the selection of party leaders or state officers, Martin and Castor would team against him and look to Morton as the dispenser of the federal patronage.⁸ These three men also made exceedingly clever arrangements for the state convention. Fearing that Bryan would speak on silver, demand fusion, even compete with Morton for the gubernatorial nomination, they played upon Bryan's obsession with McKinley. Above the stage in Funke's Opera House, in Lincoln, they hung a portrait of Cleveland on one side and one of Stevenson on the other, but in the front and center they provided a huge and remarkable likeness of Bryan and below it a long banner inscribed with "The People of Nebraska Find Their Champion Here, Not in Ohio." After Morton was nominated by acclamation as

⁷ Lon V. Stephens to Jesse E. Boell, January 25, 1925, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress; Charles S. Thomas to Paxton Hibben, July 16, 1928, Paxton Hibben, *The Peerless Leader: William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 1929), p. 146.

⁸ James C. Olson, *J. Sterling Morton* (Lincoln, 1942), p. 377.

the man who could most effectively oppose the "radical" Van Wyck, resolutions endorsing Cleveland and the Chicago platform were adopted—silver went unmentioned—and also a resolution reading, "That we endorse the course of Hon. W. J. Bryan in Congress and point with pride to him as a resolute and brilliant champion of the masses against the classes." The division of the Nebraska Democracy was wonderfully illustrated in the naming of a Bourbon for governor and the simultaneous endorsing of the state's most prominent progressive.⁹

The sending of McKinley into his territory was a notable compliment to Bryan—one not lost on him, the nation's politicians, or political writers. Yet so obsessed was he with his desire to refute McKinley that Bryan played right into the hands of Nebraska's Democratic state leaders. The latter had invited him to answer McKinley. He did so, and they publicly praised him as a tariff reformer—but they secretly congratulated themselves in having been spared a speech on silver. They may also have promised him aid in his re-election if he in turn supported Morton, and the uninitiated Democrat was thrilled to see Morton and Bryan, the old and the young, the conservative and the progressive, ride to the convention in the same carriage and appear to be in perfect harmony. Yet a foundation for real accord was lacking. Bryan and Morton both favored tariff reform and opposed Cleveland, so much so that Morton refused an invitation from the Democratic National Committee to stump for Cleveland, and Bryan refused to speak for him outside of his own district, but they disagreed on the money question, and each interpreted the state platform to suit himself. Morton decided that Van Wyck rather than Crouse was the man to beat and campaigned almost exclusively in opposition to silver. Bryan campaigned on tariff reform and silver, especially on the dangers in bills proposing to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, and concentrated on those rural districts

⁹ *Nebraska State Journal, The Omaha Daily Bee, Omaha Morning World-Herald, August 31, 1892.*

that contained the Populist votes he needed.¹⁰

Hitchcock assigned his most astute political reporter, Richard L. Metcalfe, to help Bryan, and used the *World-Herald* to urge Democratic-Populist co-operation and the collection of funds for Bryan's campaign,¹¹ but the Populist state press gave Bryan little support. Some Populists believed the man more important than party and said they would vote for him; others refused to be "driven" to bolt their party. When Bryan was asked how he felt about crossing over party lines, he replied that he was like "the old Baptist lady who got to shouting at a Methodist camp meeting. When her attention was called to the fact that she was not in the right congregation, she said, 'That is all right. I was born a Baptist but have strong Methodist tendencies.'" He is reported to have added, "I was born a Democrat but I have strong Alliance tendencies."¹²

The outstanding event of the Nebraska elections of 1892 was the series of debates between Bryan and Field held before very large audiences between September 12 and mid-October, the first and last in Lincoln, and nine others in the most important towns in their district. The newspaper reports were heavily colored by the preconceptions of owners, editors, and reporters. The Republican press, especially the *Nebraska State Journal*, consistently praised Field and portrayed him as a mastiff shaking a nondescript puppy by the scruff of the neck; the Democratic press, especially the *World-Herald*, could find little wrong with Bryan.

When Bryan launched into the silver question in the very first debate, old-line Democrats like Sawyer, Watkins, Ames, and Harwood feigned painful signs of nausea. Ac-

¹⁰ *Nebraska State Journal*, September 3, 1892; *The Omaha Daily Bee*, October 1, 1892; *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, August 30, 1892; William Jennings Bryan, *The First Battle* (Chicago, 1897), pp. 72, 75.

¹¹ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, August 21, September 3, 1892.

¹² *Ibid.*, September 29, 1892; Jesse E. Boell, "The Career of William Jennings Bryan to 1896," (MA thesis, University of Nebraska, 1929), p. 104.

ording to the Republicans, Bryan demanded silver only because it would gain him Populist votes, a thoroughly reprehensible objective. In contrast, Field was "a forceful fighter, a strong and honest debater and stout champion of American interests, the sturdy Nebraska boy who is the nominee of the party of honest money and industrial progress."¹³ Caught between Rosewater and Gere, Bryan was represented as repeating in each debate the speech he had made in answer to McKinley and as a "flimsy balloon of mixed oratory and flapdoodle." It was a hard year for "demagogues" and Field was making the "young man . . . look tired."¹⁴

Field rested between debates and Bryan, who did not, was fatigued because of the strenuousness of his campaign. Metcalfe's report of a typical Bryan week reads:

Monday night Bryan spoke at Rulo. The next morning he drove to Falls City and after knocking Mr. Field out in a debate, pushed across country to Salem, where he addressed a great gathering. Wednesday afternoon he was at Verdon, talking to 300 farmers. In the evening he had whipped his horses to Stella, twelve miles beyond, where he spoke to a gathering of several thousand. Thursday afternoon he wiped up the floor of the Auburn platform with Judge Field, and in the evening his horses had carried him to . . . Brownville, where he addressed another great gathering. From Brownville he drove to Johnson and talked to 400 farmers Friday afternoon. In the evening he addressed a good crowd of farmers at Brock, and at 11:30 at night he drove across the country to Auburn, a distance of thirteen miles, where at 2 o'clock he retired to a much needed rest. At 2:30 on Saturday afternoon he reached Nebraska City, and after laying his opponent beneath the sod in the evening before a delighted multitude he sped to Lincoln to mingle with his family.¹⁵

While the Republicans said that Field was always ready "to give the insistent calamity howler another artistic skinning," their professions were belied by the shrill crescendo of their denunciations of Bryan: in September, Bryan was trying to climb out of the hole Field had put him into; by the middle of October, when the debates ended,

¹³ *Nebraska State Journal*, September 13, 18, 1892.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, September 20, 23, 30, 1892; *The Omaha Daily Bee*, September 13, 17, 1892.

¹⁵ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, October 19, 1892.

he was an unreliable, unprincipled, dodging demagogue, an advocate of wildcat currency whose tailfeathers trailed the dust. The march of events had "busted" his tariff reform arguments and left him only with the sophomoric chestnuts of old Adam Smith. Gere, of the *Nebraska State Journal*, proved a poor prophet by saying that free trade and the money question would be as dead as slavery and squatter sovereignty after November.¹⁶ Despite their pronounced leaning toward Bryan, Democratic press reports treated Field in a dignified fashion, were less partisan, and possessed a much truer ring and wider appeal than the Republican.

Field hurt his cause by getting all mixed up even when reading from notes, and by fumbling for words at crucial moments, the improper use of grammar, and a dryness of delivery increased by injecting long arrays of statistics into the debate. He also lost his temper and was reported seeking an opportunity to "call Bryan down." Bryan remained cool and courteous, but without lessening the power of his retorts. "I have saw," Metcalfe reported Field to have said at the close of the debates, "I have saw enthusiastic people before, but I have never saw so much enthusiasm as Bryan creates." At the end of a debate held in Auburn, according to Metcalfe, fifty people shook hands with Field and two thousand with Bryan.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Bryan's "Field Days" were strenuous days. To his first debate Bryan carried a gripsack full of American-made dry goods and cutlery obtained on a visit to Mexico the previous winter, and used them to show the high cost of the tariff to the American consumer. He flashed pocket knives, butcher knives, and red flannel with such persistence that a deaf man might have suspected him of being a traveling salesman. Field soon appeared with a

¹⁶ *Nebraska State Journal*, October 10, 14, 17, 19, 1892; *The Omaha Daily Bee*, October 13, 19, 1892.

¹⁷ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, September 13, 14, 23, 26, October 19, 1892.

number of similar items.¹⁸

Field was given a big boost by the Charles F. Peck report. As Commissioner of the Bureau of Statistics of the state of New York, Peck had collected wage statistics by letter since December 1890 from six thousand New York manufacturers. From their figures Peck concluded that the McKinley tariff had not lowered workers' wages but had actually increased them. Peck was haled to court by a commission appointed by the Democratic National Committee but refused to divulge the writers of the letters, and Bryan debated under a cloud until Peck destroyed the letters and fled the country, thereby thoroughly discrediting his report.¹⁹ Referring to Bryan and Field on the tariff, Metcalfe wrote about "the walkaway of the hero of tariff reform with the pigmy of bogus protection."²⁰

Stating that "The money question is a local question . . . therefore we'll discuss the tariff," Field sought to avoid debate on silver, but Bryan forced him to acknowledge his challenge. Field won the first round by pointing out that Bryan and Morton stood on the same platform and accusing Bryan of being out of step with both his state and national platforms. Bryan replied that he had favored silver since 1890 and that he hoped to gain not only Populist but Republican votes also by advocating it, particularly the votes of those who had supported Connell, his Republican opponent of 1890, who stood on a free silver platform, adding ". . . whatever may be the views of other Democrats, I propose to give my every endeavor and my earnest effort

¹⁸ William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925), p. 254; Esther McCurdy, "William Jennings Bryan in Congress, 1890-1895: A Study of His Political and Economic Concepts," (Ms, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society), p. 2.

¹⁹ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, June 18, September 21, 23, 25, 28, 1892; *The Omaha Daily Bee*, October 15, 1892; Nelson W. Aldrich, "The McKinley Act and the Cost of Living," *Forum*, XIV (November 1892), 242-253; Denis T. Lynch, *Grover Cleveland: A Man Four Square* (New York, 1932), p. 405; Everett P. Wheeler, *Sixty Years of American Life* (New York, 1917), p. 211.

²⁰ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, September 21, 1892.

to the passage of a free coinage law. Though I should be left alone . . . I would not be turned from my course by the attitude of other men of my own party." Colonel A. L. Bixby, who wrote an entertaining column for the *Nebraska State Journal*, parodied Bryan:

I like free coinage theories
To spin out by the ream,
It makes the listening thousands howl,
Will catch me many votes this fall;
Of course I don't believe them all—
I am not what I seem.²¹

In an early debate Bryan slapped a silver dollar on a table and offered Field a dollar for the answer to each of a list of ten questions, five on the tariff, five on money. When Field said he did not have time to answer them, Bryan raised the offer to \$1.50, then \$2.50, provided Field write out the answers for the press, and read him a list of thirty-five questions. Field replied verbally and Bryan refused to pay him.²² Bryan then discussed each question and told Field he was amazed at his attempt to dodge them, since they were questions directly involved in the campaign. The audiences "went wild" when he touched the silver question, and he cautioned them not to take up his debate time with applause. Referring to a July 4 speech he had made before Tammany Hall, New York City, Bryan said, "The difference between my opponent and myself is that I made a Western speech before an Eastern people and he makes an Eastern speech before Western people."²³

Field asked Bryan how he would cast his vote if the national election were thrown into the House. Would he vote for Cleveland or James B. Weaver, the Populist presidential candidate? The national party managers had arranged that no Democratic electors would be put up in Nebraska nor in six other Western states they believed Cleveland could not carry, and Governor Boyd had written a

²¹ *Ibid.*, September 21, 23, 1892; *Nebraska State Journal*, September 13, 1892.

²² *Nebraska State Journal*, October 16, 1892.

²³ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, September 28, 30, 1892.

letter asking Nebraska's Democrats to vote for the Populist electors. Field charged Bryan with being willing to vote for the Weaver electors in order to gain votes for himself but with planning to vote for Cleveland if the election fell into the House. Bryan answered directly: he preferred Weaver to Cleveland, but he had been elected a Democrat and he would vote for Cleveland whether he himself was elected or not.²⁴

The rest of Field's attack consisted of charges to the effect that Bryan was a prohibitionist and a Catholic, that he was the recipient of a boodle fund, and that he was being aided by both Morton and Shamp. The Republican press said that Bryan was a "hypocritic cuss" who toadied to everyone from preacher to bum and preached temperance but took his whiskey straight with "the boys," but Louis Heimrod, president of the Personal Rights League of Nebraska, said that Field's charge that Bryan was a prohibitionist was "an absolute falsehood . . . employed simply as a dishonest method to bring about [Bryan's] defeat. . . ." Field made it appear that Bryan was connected with the American Protective Association, a nativist group, while members of the organization were told that, being Irish, he was Catholic, and several members of the local Ancient Order of Hibernians were prevailed upon to spread the rumor that the Order had gone into politics to help Bryan, which was not the case. An attempt to make capital out of Bryan's three congressional appointees backfired because one appointee was Protestant, one Catholic, and one professed no religion.²⁵

The boodle charge stemmed from a meeting of the Omaha Jackson and Samoset clubs called ostensibly to arrange for a speech by Bryan. These clubs were notorious for their cutthroat warfare against each other, and when it developed that they were trying to bury the hatchet long

²⁴ *Ibid.*, October 23, November 4, 1892; *The Omaha Daily Bee*, November 2, 1892; *Nebraska State Journal*, July 18, September 13, 1892.

²⁵ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, October 26, November 7, 1892.

enough to support Bryan and to raise a thousand dollars in the Second District to help him in the First, Rosewater asserted that Bryan had never done anything for Omaha while in Congress and that with such a fund he could carry the saloon element and the purchasable vote of Lincoln, where Field was strongest. But it was the Field managers who played the whiskey vote by serving notice on the saloon keepers of Lincoln to work against Bryan or be refused license renewals.²⁶ Metcalfe then slammed back with the information that Field had been given \$20,000 by the Republicans of the East and that he would receive up to \$80,000 more, if needed, to beat Bryan, although Metcalfe's Republican informant believed that between \$20,000 and \$50,000 could defeat him. "If he hadn't talked so much free silver he might have stood half a show, but now he is up the shoot," Metcalfe had been told.²⁷

The answer to Field's charge that Bryan did not appreciate the help given him by Morton and Shamp was provided by Rosewater himself, who said with an unsuspectedly large amount of truth that "Bryan is not built that way." He also noted that Morton asked Democratic voters to "give Bryan the preference" but that Bryan "never asked anybody to vote for Morton and traded him off whenever there was a chance to do so."²⁸ Bryan was fighting for his political life, and for him politics was war to the hilt. Finally, the Republicans said that for a Republican to vote for Bryan because they followed him on silver would be, as Gere put it, "a stab at the heart of good government, not necessarily fatal, but criminally foolish."²⁹

Strangely enough, Bryan presented no learned arguments on the money question during his campaign. He said, "I don't know anything about free silver. The people of Nebraska are for free silver and I am for free silver.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, October 30, November 4, 1892; *The Omaha Daily Bee*, September 8, October 25, November 7, 1892.

²⁷ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, October 24, 1892.

²⁸ *The Omaha Daily Bee*, October 24, 1892.

²⁹ *Nebraska State Journal*, October 20, 1892.

I will look up the arguments later."³⁰ He had been so busy with the tariff in Congress, he told suspicious Populists, that he could not find time to study the money question, and he had a certificate from the silver members of the House Coinage Committee to uphold him. His admission of ignorance can be doubted, for Bryan began studying the money question soon after the election of 1890. While it won over many farmers, it led Morton to state that "Bryan is so self-adjusting that—in his fine flexibility—he can agree with a greater number of persons who hold different views on the same question than any pinfeathered economist I have ever met."³¹

When Bryan said that he would not be deviated from his course on silver by the attitude of other men in his party, he referred directly to Morton, who stumped on the theme that he was sorry to disagree with Bryan but that he was wrong on the money question. Bryan's supporters twisted Morton's comments into anti-Bryan statements and openly declared that they would vote for Van Wyck and Bryan rather than Morton and Bryan. Bryan insisted that he and Morton were on friendly terms and that he was not a party to the move to oppose Morton, but rumors that he was knifing the Sage persisted until the latter became convinced that the silver Democrats were working against him and that they were his worst enemies. "They are thickest among Bryan's friends and seek to trade me off for Van Wyck to get in exchange votes for Bryan," he wrote a sister.³²

The disparate programs advocated by Morton and Bryan inevitably raised the question of "How can the Democrats of the First district support free silver Bryan and honest money Morton?" Gold men pointed out that Bryan had bolted the state and national platforms of his own accord and that Morton could not be held responsible

³⁰ Omaha *Morning World-Herald*, September 23, 1892.

³¹ Letter to Michael D. Harter, January 9, 1893; Olson, *op. cit.* p. 344.

³² Letter to Emma Morton, October 6, 1892, *ibid.*

for his fate—"It was Bryan, not Morton who raised the rebellion." Yet Morton behaved queerly. He would advance the usual arguments for tariff reform, declare his unqualified support for Bryan for re-election, and then give a forceful speech against free silver. Could it be that Morton thought that by supporting low tariff views and the gold standard he might secure a cabinet appointment if Cleveland were elected? "There are going to be some very cross-eyed Democrats in the First district who are endeavoring to believe Morton and vote for Bryan," commented Rosewater.³³

As for Jerome Shamp, the Populist candidate, he made too many mistakes and was deserted by his own party. Metcalfe furnished convincing proof that Field and Shamp were working in collusion against Bryan. Field's law partner, representing the Republican State Central Committee, had delivered to Shamp's brother a one thousand mile railroad ticket for Jerome's personal use.³⁴ Shamp's attempt to lie his way out of having received the gift, worth twenty-five dollars, even after the Populist Executive Committee of the First District confirmed that he travelled on Republican money, proved him a prevaricator unworthy of any man's vote. A number of Populist leaders, organized into a "Gideon's Band," a sworn secret association, also let it be known that he was a stool pigeon set up to attract votes away from Field and thus help elect Bryan.³⁵

Bryan had excellent Populist support in the last days of the campaign. Bryan said that between himself and a Populist like McKeighan "there was no essential difference . . . except in name," and McKeighan spoke of Bryan as "an honor and a credit to the people of Nebraska," and nationally known Populist leaders came to Bryan's aid in the week before the elections. On November 1, Mrs. Lease,

³³ *The Omaha Daily Bee*, November 4, 1892.

³⁴ Interview with Thomas S. Allen and Richard L. Metcalfe by Jesse E. Boell, reported in Boell, "Career of William Jennings Bryan to 1896," p. 104; *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, September 28, 1892.

³⁵ *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, October 21, 30, 1892; *Nebraska State Journal*, November 10, 1892.



William Jennings Bryan



Allen W. Field

"The People's Joan of Arc," spoke at Omaha, and on the second she and Weaver spoke in Lincoln, countering the visits of McKinley in August and of Senator Joseph Foraker (Republican, Ohio) and of McKinley again in October. On the night before election both the Democrats and Populists in Lincoln paraded for Bryan in the greatest political demonstration of the year, causing an old time G. O. P. leader, John L. Webster, to confess that his party was "hanging on by its eyebrows in Nebraska."⁸⁶

The Republicans won the electoral vote, the state officers, including the governorship, and three of the six congressmen. Kem and McKeighan were re-elected, but the vote in the First District was so close that neither Bryan nor Field dared predict success. Four days passed before the official returns declared Bryan the victor by 140 votes. Champ ran an exceedingly poor third. Bryan said that "under the circumstances" he was satisfied. He had run ahead of the state ticket in Lancaster County and led Morton from a low of 500 votes in Otoe County to a high of 1,600 in Richardson County. He received more votes in his district than Cleveland and Weaver combined. In a district Republican by 1,200 votes, despite the indecent treatment of him by the Republican press, Field's use of a "decoy duck," Eastern Republican "boodle" money, imported big-name Republican orators, and the always potent influence of the railroads, Bryan had been re-elected. Again he was Nebraska's only Democratic congressman. Bryan thanked Hitchcock and Metcalfe of the Omaha *World-Herald* for their invaluable aid, acknowledged that he could not have succeeded without Populist support, and also thanked the Young Republicans who had voted for him.

⁸⁶ *The Omaha Daily Bee*, October 19, 1892; *Omaha Morning World-Herald*, October 25, 27, November 8, 1892.