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Article Title: Fairview: Home of William Jennings Bryan

Full Citation: Phyllis H Winkelman, "Fairview: Home of William Jennings Bryan," *Nebraska History* 55 (1974): 142-156

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1974Fairview.pdf>

Date: 10/10/2014

Article Summary: From 1902 until 1913 the Bryan family lived at Fairview, a farm with magnificent views of the countryside where the statesman's children could enjoy rural activities. Prominent friends travelling across the country frequently visited the mansion that Bryan had constructed on the farm.

Cataloging Information:

Names: William Jennings Bryan, Mary Baird Bryan, William Jennings Bryan Jr, Grace Dexter Bryan, Ruth Baird Bryan, Charles Weyland Bryan, Nancy Lillard Bryan, Artemus A Roberts, Woodrow Wilson, Adolphus R Talbot, William Homer Leavitt, Yasachira Bryan Yamashita

Nebraska Place Names: Lincoln

Keywords: Fairview, William Jennings Bryan, *The First Battle*, *The Commoner*, Woodrow Wilson, Lincoln Methodist Hospital (Bryan Memorial Hospital), Round Table, University of Nebraska, Charles Weyland Bryan, Friends of Fairview, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Normal Methodist Church

Photographs / Images: Fairview c. 1912; reception hall, before and after restoration; curio room; dining room in basement living area; Bryan and his niece Mary Louise; haying on Bryan land east of Lincoln



Fairview, about 1912.

FAIRVIEW: HOME OF WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

By PHYLLIS H. WINKELMAN¹

"I want you to pay particular notice to the view which my place commands," William Jennings Bryan remarked to a visitor. "I bought the first five acres seven years ago. Mrs. Bryan and I had been driving, and we stopped here to admire the scenery. We paid \$250 an acre for the first five acres. We figured it this way: the scenery is worth \$100, the climate \$100, and the soil \$50."

The year was 1900, and Bryan was referring to Fairview, his country home then three miles southeast of downtown Lincoln. Situated on a knoll in the suburb of Normal, Fairview afforded a magnificent view of the rolling countryside with its cultivated fields, tree-shaded farm places, and the thickly wooded valley of nearby Antelope Creek.²

In 1897 Bryan purchased an adjoining twenty acres at \$100 to \$150 per acre and set out orchard and shade trees. In 1901 an additional ten acres were purchased, and by 1908 the farm consisted of 160 acres. Later purchases brought the total to an estimated 350 acres, some of it in smaller, scattered plots separated from Fairview.

The original story-and-a-half house on the farm was occupied by a tenant, with one room reserved for Bryan's Spanish-American War mementos. The house burned in 1905. To the north and west were vegetable gardens, and behind the house stood a windmill and chicken coop. The coop, with a special sliding plank door which Bryan had designed himself, housed his prized Leghorn and Wyandotte chickens.

Following their custom of selecting a holiday or an anniversary for embarking on a new venture, the Bryans lifted the first shovelful of dirt and staked out the foundation for their new

home southeast of the farmhouse on October 1, 1901, the anniversary of seventeen years of marriage and fourteen years in Lincoln. The foundation was put in that fall and construction began in the spring of 1902.

After selling their frame home at 1625 D Street,³ the family moved into the new brick barn at Fairview on March 19, Bryan's forty-second birthday. With its slate roof and cement floors, the spacious barn provided comfortable temporary quarters for the family during the summer. In October, 1902, the Bryans celebrated their eighteenth wedding anniversary in the new home at Fairview, although construction was not completed until 1903.

In moving to Fairview, Bryan was apparently motivated primarily by a desire to give his children a similar rural upbringing which he himself had enjoyed as a child. When he was six years old, Bryan's father, Judge Silas Lillard Bryan, purchased a six hundred-acre farm on the outskirts of Salem, Illinois. Although most of the land was rented out, there were still animals to feed, wood to cut, and other general chores for the Bryan boys. Bryan attributed his powerful physique and great stamina to his youthful life on the farm. He had a great fondness for animals, and his own children were attached to their pets. They buried their favorite dogs and horses at Fairview, and a dog's tombstone may still be seen near the east wall of the Bryan home.

As a figure of national and international prominence, Bryan also wanted the new residence to become a midwestern oasis for friends and visitors traveling from coast to coast. A great admirer of Thomas Jefferson, he envisioned Fairview as a Monticello for future generations of Democrats.

The mansion at Fairview symbolized the fact that Bryan was now a man of substance as well as an influential political leader and famous orator. The house cost about \$17,000, a large sum for the period. Chided by newspaper comments that Republican prosperity had enabled him to build such an expensive house, Bryan replied that it was built from the proceeds of his book, *The First Battle*, published immediately after the 1896 campaign when Republicans could claim no credit for prosperous times. Through his publications, books, editorials, syndicated

articles, *The Commoner*,⁴ and particularly through his lectures, Bryan made his fortune. As the highest-paid speaker in the United States, he commanded as much as one thousand dollars per lecture. By 1908 his surplus funds amounted to more than one hundred thousand dollars, and ultimately his estate is said to have totaled one million dollars. This was due somewhat to Mrs. Bryan's excellent management of the family finances.⁵

The Bryan home was designed by Artemus A. Roberts (1841-1944), who had been a Lincoln architect since 1870. The house is a fine example of a combination of two architectural styles popular in Lincoln at the turn of the century: the Queen Anne and the Classic Revival. A substantial mansion of soft-toned brick with white trim, some detractors have referred to it facetiously as belonging to the "General Grant School of Architecture." It rises four stories, including a daylight basement and an attic. A slate roof with numerous gables and dormers, a tower with a squared conical roof, cornices decorated with wooden saw-work, and numerous cut- and stained-glass windows comprise some of the finishing touches on the house.⁶

A tree-bordered drive paved with brick once led to the steps of a large, semi-circular front porch. With its exposed hilltop location, the porch was often swept by chilly breezes, and in 1908 the Bryans converted it into an enclosed reception room. On either side of the front steps were placed bronze lions, acquired in Korea during the Bryans' world tour of 1905-1906. Bryan humorously spoke of them as representing the conflict between the liberal and conservative points of view, since the mouth of one was open and the mouth of the other closed.

The basement served as a family living area and contained the dining room, kitchen, pantry, furnace and storage rooms. Here also was Bryan's study where he wrote his speeches, books, and editorials for *The Commoner*.

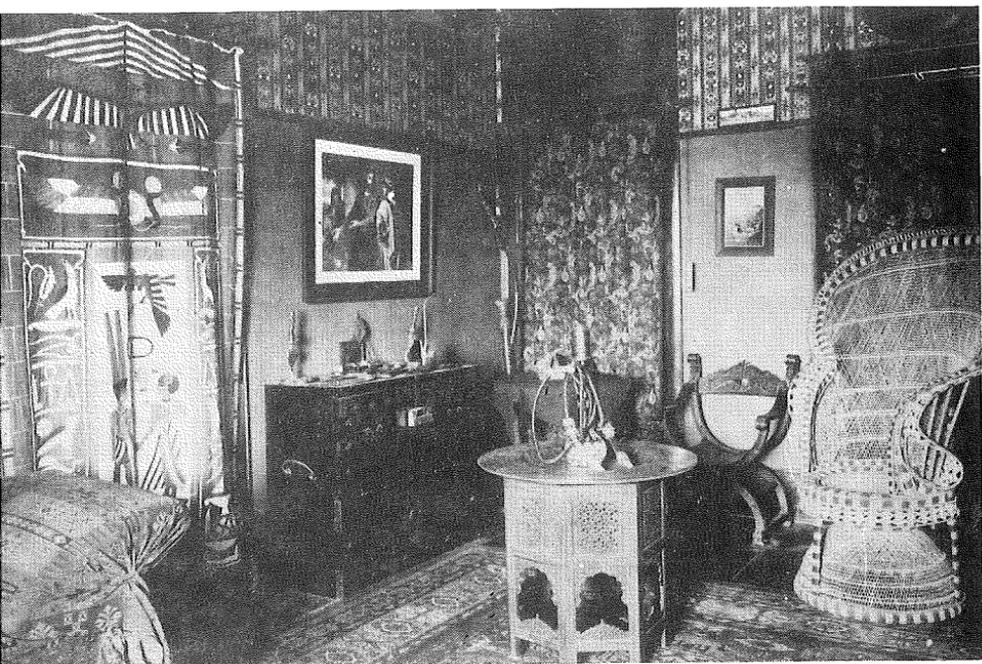
Central to the main or first floor was a large reception hall with a marble-faced fireplace. Opening off this room were the front parlor, the library (the heart of the household), and the curio room. Toward the back were William, Jr.'s bedroom, a bathroom, and the rear parlor. The numerous fireplaces installed throughout the home were not as unusual in a country



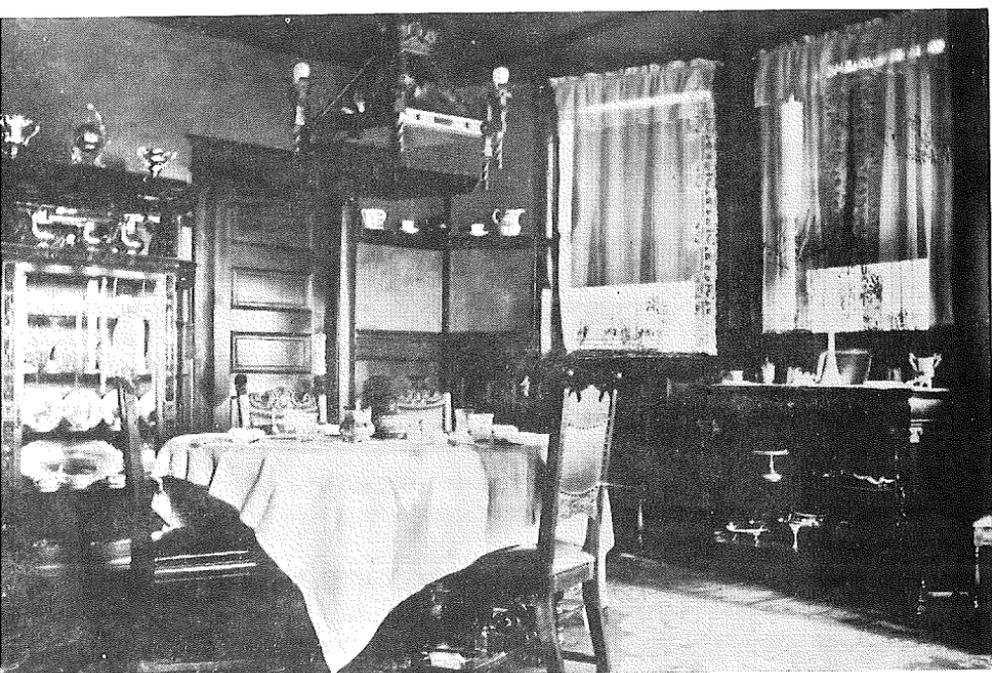
Reception hall. Note round table by the window carved with four elephant heads whose ivory tusks form legs. The rug is a bear skin.



The restored reception hall. Note ostrich egg suspended from chandelier in front parlor (far right).



Curio room opening off the reception hall. It contained mementos of Bryan's travels in America and abroad.



Dining room in basement living area. Much of the food consumed by the Bryan household was of Fairview production.

house as were its conveniences of electricity and running water.

On the second floor were the master bedroom with a dressing room, three other bedrooms, a bathroom, and the Tower Room, which was used as a schoolroom for Grace, the younger daughter. As a security measure against assassination, Bryan always slept in one of the second-story bedrooms with the shades drawn.

The furnishings of the house reflected the times as well as the aspirations and attainments of the Bryans. Heavy, ornately carved furniture, fancy cushions piled on overstuffed chairs, and oriental rugs were found throughout. Pictures in many of the rooms attested to the family's deeply religious convictions. Bryan's patriotism and admiration of great national leaders were also shown in the prominent display of portraits of famous political figures. It was popular practice to collect mementos and small art objects in the home at this time, but the size of the Bryan collection was striking. As a national political figure, Bryan received thousands of gifts, ranging from an outsized stuffed alligator to four live eagles, which William, Jr., kept in cages behind the house. Some Mrs. Bryan tactfully disposed of; others formed a very integral part of the decor of Fairview. One notable object was a decorated ostrich egg—a gift during the 1896 campaign—which was suspended from the chandelier in the front parlor. Many of the mementos, particularly the Oriental and Near East items, were acquired by the Bryans during their travels. One of the most unusual Oriental pieces was a round table carved with four elephant heads whose ivory tusks formed the legs. Another unusual item, which stood in the corner of the curio room, was a cannon, a gift of the Sultan of Sulu. It was destroyed when William, Jr., and Dick Hargreaves (later Grace Bryan's husband) overcharged the gun. The resulting explosion damaged the windmill at Fairview.

The Bryan home functioned both as a public and a private residence. Hundreds were entertained at public receptions, and the spacious lawn with its flower beds, shade trees, and shrubs was frequently the scene of political rallies and lawn parties. The Bryans' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in 1909 with its six hundred guests was reputed to have been the largest home reception ever held in Lincoln.

The mansion was also the hub of Bryan's political activities. Before the November election in 1908, Bryan erected a small telegraph office in front of Fairview in order that reporters would not have to rush back and forth to town for election returns. Surrounded by reporters, Bryan learned of his third defeat. Many political leaders visited Fairview. Among them were Champ Clark, speaker of the House of Representatives, and John Kern, Vice-Presidential candidate with Bryan on the 1908 ticket. Woodrow Wilson also spent a day with the Bryans during his 1912 Presidential campaign and was photographed on the steps of Fairview with Bryan and one of his grandsons.⁷

Fairview afforded Bryan much-needed moments of privacy and relaxation from his hectic public life. At Fairview he could enjoy playing with his children (and later his grandchildren), reading aloud to his wife, or riding his favorite horse "Governor," a gift from Missouri Governor William J. Stone during the Spanish-American War.

Bryan was a country gentleman, and the farm was his hobby, not a financial endeavor. It was seldom profitable, but the farm provided much of the food for the Bryan table. He spared no expense in equipping it with modern machinery and stocking it with blooded animals. His farm hands received \$150 a month plus board and room, unusually high wages for that period. A visitor at Fairview in 1908 described a meal:⁸

When we were seated, Bryan said a few words of grace in simple invocation to the Almighty, as is his invariable custom at every meal, and we then proceeded to a simple but most excellent repast—every portion of which was of Bryan farm production. The milk was milk indeed, the cream was CREAM; the bread was most delicious; the meat was tender—everything was neat, tasty, appetizing and home made.

In 1906 Bryan began the gradual disposal of the Fairview estate when he donated a tract of land along Antelope Creek to the city for the establishment of Antelope Park. The land lay between the city proper and Fairview and was the largest of a number of land donations for the project. In 1921 he deeded the mansion at Fairview and ten acres of land to the Nebraska Methodist Conference as the site for Lincoln Methodist Hospital. This name was changed to Bryan Memorial Hospital after Bryan's death in 1925. The hospital was built west of the house, and Fairview itself became a home for student nurses.⁹

THE BRYAN FAMILY

As an orator, statesman, writer, and political leader, William Jennings Bryan advocated social, political, and economic reforms which were considered radical at the turn of the century. His program included currency and tariff reform, regulation of railroad rates, the establishment of a federal income tax, woman suffrage, representation of labor in the Presidential cabinet, popular election of U. S. Senators, direct primary for the nomination of candidates, and initiative and referendum in state government.

In the area of international relations, he was an early advocate of independence for the Philippines, and as secretary of state he negotiated "cooling off treaties" in accordance with which nations were not to resort to war for one year after disputes were submitted to arbitration. Eventually much of Bryan's program gained acceptance, and probably no other political leader in American history lived to see so many of the measures he advocated enacted into law.¹⁰

The first prominent statesman from the trans-Mississippi area, he was an eloquent spokesman for the newly settled West. As the dynamic leader of the Democratic Party for sixteen years, he recast the party in the progressive mold, and though defeated as a Presidential candidate, he became the powerful and effective voice of the opposition.

Bryan, five feet, ten inches tall and weighing about two hundred pounds in mid-life, was described by his contemporaries as a handsome man with a powerful physique. Besides a warm smile, poise, great charm, and sincerity, Bryan possessed a magnetic personality which attracted people to him regardless of whether or not they agreed with him politically. His tremendous energy, good nature, and unusual recuperative powers gave him an enormous capacity for work. One of the great orators of all time, his baritone voice had remarkable vibrancy and carrying power. Some said Bryan's voice had a messianic quality that held audiences spellbound. In his wrinkled trousers, alpaca coat, turned-down collar, and string tie, he swept across the international scene as the embodiment of the American dream to elevate the common man.

Bryan met his future wife, then Mary Baird, when both were students in Illinois and immediately set about courting her with characteristic enthusiasm. When their clandestine meetings and buggy rides became known, Mary's school principal ordered her home and personally escorted her to the station. As the train pulled out, Bryan came forward from the baggage car where he had been hiding and proposed to Mary. She was reinstated in her school and was graduated with first honors. On October 1, 1884, Bryan slipped a wedding ring on her finger which was inscribed, "Won, 1880— One, 1884."¹¹

The Bryans were a devoted couple, and their exceptionally happy marriage was based on a close personal and intellectual relationship in which their very different temperaments complemented each other. They also shared a lively sense of humor which helped them to surmount domestic and political crises.

In July, 1887, Bryan paid a short visit to Adolphus R. Talbot, a school friend, who had opened a law office in Lincoln. Much impressed by the young city's cultural advantages and by the opportunities for a young man in the rapidly growing West, Bryan accepted his friend's offer of a partnership in the law office. Bryan arrived in Lincoln on his third wedding anniversary, and his wife and infant daughter Ruth joined them after construction of their D Street home.¹²

Although acclaimed in the capitals of the world and frequently sojourning elsewhere, Bryan regarded Lincoln as his home between 1887 and 1921, when he moved to Florida for his wife's health. From the first the Bryans took an active interest in the civic and religious life of Lincoln. They belonged to numerous civic clubs and were active in the Y.W.C.A. and Y.M.C.A. Bryan was one of the founders of the Round Table, a discussion group for men, and Mary Bryan helped to organize the women's Lincoln Sorosis Club. Interested in education, Bryan actively supported the University of Nebraska and even attended football games when time permitted. The Bryans transferred their membership from the First Presbyterian Church in Lincoln to Westminster Presbyterian Church after they moved to Fairview. Here Bryan, as a church elder, served communion to Woodrow Wilson, also a Presbyterian elder, during Wilson's 1912 visit to Fairview. The Bryans also

worshipped at the small Normal Methodist Church in order to become better acquainted with their neighbors, and both Bryans taught Sunday school there. Bryan also made himself available, free of charge, as a speaker at local high school, church, and civic affairs.

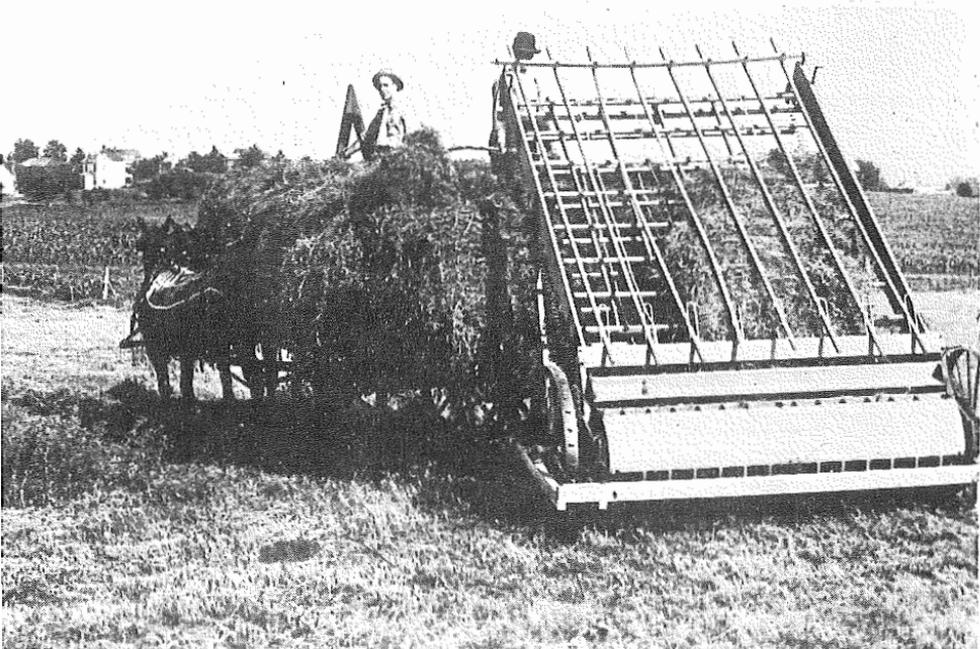
Mrs. Bryan studied law for the sole purpose of helping her husband in his work and was admitted to practice in the Supreme Court of Nebraska in 1888. She was Bryan's constant companion, advisor and critic, and he discussed almost everything with her. Bryan valued her opinion and called her "my mental safety valve." For many years she served as her husband's secretary. Even after he hired a private secretary, Mary Bryan continued to handle much of his correspondence. After the death of her husband in 1925, she completed his biography, entitled the *Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan*. She died in 1930 and was buried beside her husband in Arlington National Cemetery.

The Bryans' three children, Ruth Baird, William Jennings, Jr., and Grace Dexter, all received their early education from their mother and added youthful exuberance to life at Fairview.^{1 3}

Ruth was an attractive young lady of sixteen when the family moved to Fairview. She had inherited her father's poise and much of his speaking ability. At eighteen Ruth married William Homer Leavitt, an artist who had come to Fairview to paint her father's portrait. The Bryans violently opposed the marriage due to a considerable difference in the couple's ages. Mrs. Bryan did not attend the wedding, but a reconciliation between the Leavitts and the Bryans came with the arrival of grandchildren. Fairview again became Ruth's home when Leavitt abandoned his family to study art in Paris. Ruth's second marriage, to Reginald Altham Owen, a British Army officer, occurred at Fairview in 1910, a year after she divorced Leavitt. Major Owen died in 1927. He had been injured during World War I and spent much of his later life as an invalid. To support her family, Ruth pursued a successful career as a lecturer, writer, speech instructor, and congresswoman. From 1933 to 1936 she served as minister to Denmark. Her third marriage, to Captain Borge Rohde of the Danish Royal Guards, occurred in 1936 at Hyde Park, New York, the home of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.



William Jennings Bryan and niece Mary Louise, daughter of his brother Charles. The car is thought to be a Studebaker Electric (manufactured between 1902-1912). Fairview is in the background.



Haying on Bryan acres east of Lincoln. The hayloader was of recent manufacture (about 1910). Bryan's employees were supplied with the newest machinery.

Ruth died July 27, 1954, and was buried at St. Alban's Church in Copenhagen, Denmark.

William Jennings, Jr., was twelve when the family moved to Fairview. Lively and mischievous, he perpetrated numerous pranks and suffered various physical mishaps. William attended high school in Lincoln, then the University of Nebraska. In 1909 he left Lincoln following his marriage to Helen Virginia Berger of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and practiced law in Arizona and California. From 1938 to 1953 he was collector of customs for the southern district of California.

As a frail eleven year old when the family moved to Fairview, Grace Dexter was educated by a governess in the Tower Room. She later attended Lincoln public schools and Hollins Institute in Virginia. Grace resembled her mother and was quiet and domestically inclined. During 1905 and 1906 she and William, Jr., accompanied their parents on a world tour. On June 7, 1911, Grace wed Richard Lewis Hargreaves at Fairview. She died in Florida in 1945 and was buried with her parents at Arlington National Cemetery.

For five and a half years, Sir Yaschichira Bryan Yamashita of Kagashima, Japan, was also part of the Bryan household. An admirer of Bryan, young Yamashita "adopted" the family by arriving unannounced at the Bryans' doorstep though he had received a written refusal to his request to join the household. He won their acceptance and admiration, took the Bryan name as part of his own, and stayed to be educated by them in the Lincoln public schools and the University of Nebraska. Yamashita returned to Japan and became prominent in Japanese diplomatic circles and the Japanese Peace Society. When the Bryans visited Japan in 1905, they visited Yamashita's father. Some of Fairview's most beautiful Satsuma pieces were gifts from Yamashita's neighbors and relatives in appreciation of the aid the Bryans were giving to the young Japanese boy.¹⁴

Bryan's brother and sisters, who came to Nebraska in the 1890's, were also Lincoln residents, and they made substantial contributions to Bryan's political career.

Charles Weyland Bryan, "Brother Charlie," was Bryan's political secretary and business manager from 1897 to 1925. He also served as associate editor and business manager for *The*

Commoner from 1901 to 1923. A strong figure in his own right, Charles was mayor of Lincoln for two terms, a member of the City Council in 1921, and Nebraska's governor for three terms (1923-1925 and 1931-1935). In 1924 he was named Democratic candidate for Vice President on a ticket with John W. Davis. They were defeated by Calvin Coolidge and Charles Gates Dawes.

Bryan's sisters also contributed to his political career. Nancy Lillard Bryan served her brother as a private secretary until her death in 1904. Frances Bryan Millson Baird, "Aunt Fannie," was the eldest of the family and lived in a house Bryan built for her and her husband James. Her son, William Bryan Millson, assisted in farming operations at Fairview from about 1900 to 1912. Mary Elizabeth Bryan Allen, the youngest of the family, served as the family historian. Her husband, Thomas Stinson Allen, was Bryan's law partner and campaign manager throughout his political career.

In 1913 when Bryan was appointed secretary of state by Woodrow Wilson, the Bryans moved to Washington, taking with them their most characteristic possessions, including the Korean lions. By 1916 Mary Bryan's health demanded a warmer climate, and they decided to take up permanent residence in Miami, Florida. Mary Bryan wrote nostalgically of her last summer at Fairview:

I shall always remember the lovely drives I have had; the country so peaceful, the wide fields, the wider skies, the little birds at breakfast, the timid cottontails occasionally crossing the road, the growing corn, the yellow grain, the low hills, so covered with fertility and thrift. There is no finer land than this same Nebraska.

FAIRVIEW TODAY

Fairview today is no longer a rural dwelling far away from the city but is situated at 4900 Sumner Street where it has been engulfed by the residential section of southeast Lincoln. In 1961 Bryan Hospital discontinued the use of Fairview as a dormitory for nurses. The Junior League of Lincoln and the Nebraska State Historical Society first entered into an agreement with the hospital board to restore Fairview as a historical house open to the public. It was a non-profit, cooperative venture with each of the three organizations assuming certain responsibilities for the restoration, maintenance, and operation of the house. Today the non-profit organization, Friends of Fairview, has replaced the Junior League in the operation.

NOTES

1. Phyllis H. Winkelman wrote the first draft of the article in 1963, when she was Director of Education at the Nebraska State Historical Society. It was then intended to be a Society educational leaflet. Recently, staff members revised the manuscript for publication near the time of the induction of William Jennings Bryan into the Nebraska Hall of Fame. The event occurred March 19, 1974, in the Capitol in Lincoln. Much of Mrs. Winkelman's article resulted from a personal knowledge of Fairview and its effects and from her perusal of Mary Elizabeth Bryan Allen's scrapbooks, clippings, and pamphlets (manuscript file, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln).

2. For an account of life at Fairview soon after its construction, see chapter XVI, "The Fairview Farmer," John R. Herrod, *The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (Chicago: G. C. Buxton, 1925), 217-224.

3. The first Bryan home in Lincoln (extant, but altered and not open to visitors) is a white clapboard structure. Three stories high, its dominant feature was once a tower with a mansard roof and exit onto a balcony, from which Bryan on occasion greeted well-wishers. The house is now divided into apartments. Paola E. Coletta, "William Jennings Bryan's First Years," *Nebraska History*, 33 (Spring, 1972), 72, 80.

4. *The Commoner*—an appellation given Bryan by his admirers—became the title of his personal political organ. A periodical published weekly at Lincoln, it began in 1901 and suspended in 1923. William J. Bryan and Mary B. Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Chicago: United Publishers of America, 1925), 282-283.

5. Herrick, *Bryan*, 225-231. Chapter XVII, "Mary Baird Bryan," details the enormous influence Mrs. Bryan exerted on her husband's career while serving as his advisor-secretary.

6. J. G. Long, *Bryan, the Great Commoner* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1928), 158, 232.

7. *Ibid.*, 205-206.

8. *Ibid.*, 181-182.

9. *Bryan Memorial Hospital, a Brief History* (pamphlet), Lincoln, 1956, 2-3.

10. Bryans, *Memoirs*, 462-471.

11. Paolo E. Coletta, "'Won, 1880—One, 1884', the Courtship of William Jennings Bryan and Mary Elizabeth Baird," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, L (1957), 231-242.

12. Herrick, *Bryan*, 56-57; Bryans, *Memoirs*, 72-73, 222.

13. Phyllis H. Winkelman, "Notes on the Bryan Family." This looseleaf folder contains her typewritten essays on the children and immediate relatives of Bryan who played a part in his meteoric political career. It also contains photographs and genealogical tables, as well as much of the un-footnoted material of this article; Bryans, *Memoirs*, 190-197.

14. Bryans, *Memoirs*, 282, 310.