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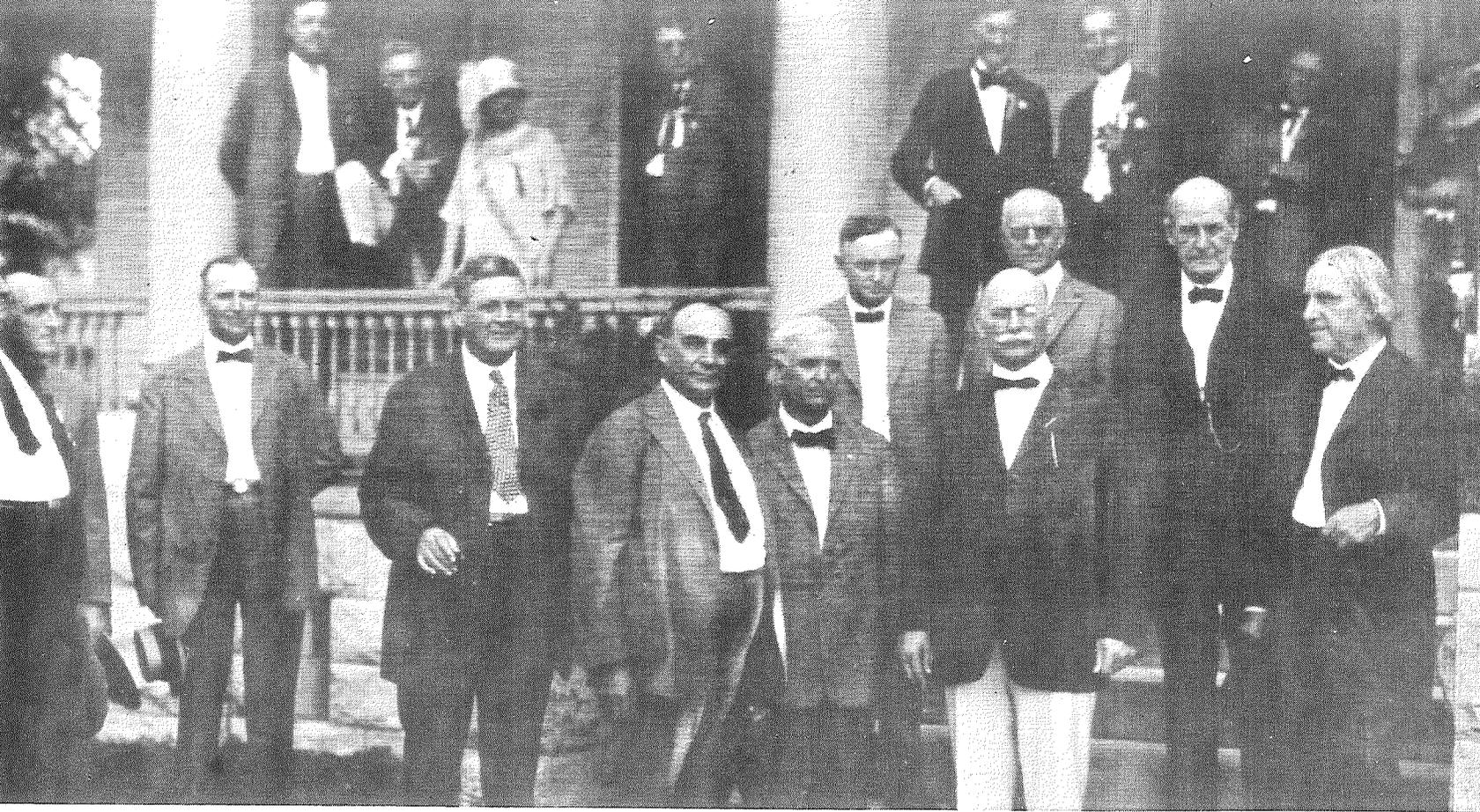
Article Summary: William Jennings Bryan was the only nationally known political figure to support prohibition from the campaign of 1910 through the passage of the 18th Amendment. Nebraskans listened to Bryan and voted dry in 1916 when Prohibition had finally become a major national issue.

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Names: William Jennings Bryan, Ashton C Shallenberger, Charley Bryan, Tom Allen, James Dahlman, Gilbert M Hitchcock, Arthur F Mullen, John B Carns, C J Smyth, William V Allen, Chester H Aldrich

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Photographs / Images: party regulars pictured at the Governor's mansion in Lincoln when Democratic Governor Charles W Bryan was notified of his nomination for the Vice-Presidency in 1924; Gilbert M Hitchcock; William V Allen



When Democratic Governor Charles W. Bryan of Nebraska was notified of his nomination for the Vice-Presidency in 1924, party regulars congregated in Lincoln at the Governor's mansion. Identified (front, from right) are Governor Bryan, former-Governor Ashton C. Shallenberger, Governor Jonathan Davis of Kansas, former-Governor L. M. Saunders of Louisiana; (on steps, from right) Congressman J. Edgar Howard, William Jennings Bryan, unidentified, Thomas S. Allen; (to left of center pillar) Arthur J. Mullen, Mrs. Emily Blair, Missouri, national women's chairman.

THE NEBRASKA DEMOCRATIC CAMPAIGN OF 1910

By PAOLO E. COLETTA

I N 1910 ONE OF THE MOST divisive issues ever to disturb the harmony of the Nebraska Democratic Party—Prohibition—was raised by William Jennings Bryan.

The “main spring” of prohibition, “the propagandistic base of national agitation,” was in the South, where for the ten years following 1906 it was a constant feature in both primary and general elections. In the form of a well-organized moral crusade it also powerfully affected the course of other reform movements during the Progressive Era. Leading Southern prohibitionists or progressives, or prohibitionists *and* progressives, were among Bryan’s friends in the South. They included Josephus Daniels and Walter Clark of North Carolina, James K. Vardaman of Mississippi, Cato Sells and Cone Johnson of Texas, and Edward Carmack and Luke Lea of Tennessee. Bryan also had hosts of friends in the myriad state anti-saloon leagues, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the Prohibition Party.¹ In Nebraska, Bryan knew the Reverend Dr. John B. Carns of Grand Island and Lincoln and the Reverend Marna S. Poulson of Lincoln, both of whom served terms as superintendent of the state Anti-Saloon League.

The Nebraska fight of 1909 over direct legislation and of 1910 over the liquor question becomes more intelligible if it is recalled that those who favored direct legislation as a device to enable the people to determine questions of public policy often

also viewed it as a means of obtaining anti-saloon legislation. The rural areas of the South, strongholds of Protestantism and nativism, already long hostile to the corporation, the industrial system, and the evils of urban civilization, and sincerely devoted to personal regeneration, social reform, and the social gospel, marched in the vanguard of the dry procession.² Though he was born in Illinois and lived in Nebraska, Bryan epitomized these Southern views: prohibition would contribute to the moral improvement of the individual and to civic progress, end the notorious abuses connected with the liquor traffic, and fulfill his conservative religious opposition to the use of liquor. Until 1910, however, he said nothing about prohibition as such; although he stressed temperance and opposed the saloon, his record in Nebraska from 1887 to 1910 was more anti-prohibitionist than prohibitionist. After his third nomination in July 1908, he had talked an hour with the candidate of the Prohibition Party, Eugene W. Chapin, but he refused even to issue a statement about their discussion. Nor did he utter a single word on prohibition in the Nebraska campaign of 1908 even though county option vied with the guarantee of bank deposits as the prime issue.

In 1909 for the first time since statehood, the Democrats controlled the Nebraska State Legislature, and they enacted a remarkable series of progressive measures. Several Democratic state senators who represented the brewing interests had already killed a direct elections of U. S. senators bill in 1908. Direct elections were now demanded by the Democratic state platform, and when Bryan learned that the brewers had sought to control the nomination of Democratic senators lest they vote for county option on the prohibition question, he posed an alternative—if they did not permit the adoption of the initiative and referendum so that county option could be obtained, he would obtain county option in order to get the initiative and referendum.³ When a direct elections bill was introduced into the legislature of 1909, his brother Charley reported to Bryan his fear that “the Republicans who supported the bill before will be pulled off” and that it would be killed in the senate. Next day he wrote about its defeat in the manner indicated.⁴

Of the eight Republicans voting against the bill, six favored county option. Had these six voted for the bill, it would have

passed. But such a close correlation between support for the initiative and referendum and county option did not exist among the people of Nebraska. At the conclusion of an address in Omaha on May 17, 1909, when Bryan asked the audience for a rising vote on the initiative and referendum, all stood but one; on the vote for county option fewer than half arose.⁵ However, on April 6 Brother Charley had written Bryan that Governor Ashton C. Shallenberger had signed a daylight saloon bill over the protests of the brewers, who had supported his election, and that referendums would soon be held in each town on whether the people preferred no saloons, on a 6:30 p.m. closing time, or on limiting saloons to twenty-five per town.⁶ Since county option was not provided for, those who lived in dry towns were inconvenienced only to the extent that they had to go beyond the town's limits to get their liquor.

The fight over this law, the bitterest since the passage of the freight rate law in the 1890's, was over a Shallenberger rather than a Bryan measure. In analyzing the defeat of the initiative and referendum, the governor realized the power of the liquor lobby and set out to break it. The lobby had already killed bills providing for county option, a constitutional amendment establishing prohibition and the denying of the sale of liquor containing more than twenty per cent of alcohol. To paraphrase Arthur F. Mullen, prominent lawyer originally from O'Neill, the prospect of making Nebraska nights as dry as Death Valley caused "hell to break loose." Under Mullen's management—though he was not a member of the legislature—the bill passed, 51 to 28 in the state house of representatives and 19 to 13 in the senate and within an hour was engrossed and sent to Governor Shallenberger. The hearing on the bill set by the governor was attended by Richard L. Metcalfe, Bryan's editorial writer, a dry aspirant for the Democratic nomination for United States Senator, but neither Brother Charley nor Tom Allen, Bryan's brother-in-law and general political manager in Lincoln at the time, appeared. Bryan, nearby in Chillicothe, Missouri, neither came to Lincoln nor sent word in support of the bill. Despite the lack of Bryanite support and despite the great onslaught by the best legal talent the brewers could hire, Shallenberger

signed the bill, conscious as he did so that the liquor interests would seek his defeat in the next election.⁷

Bryan had written editorials for the *Commoner*, his newspaper published in Lincoln, in which he favored abolishing the saloon in the capital city, and in early May its citizens voted dry. Several months later, under the threat of the legislators to move the capital elsewhere, its people voted the saloon back in by a decisive majority. Meantime some wet Democrats cancelled their subscriptions to the *Commoner*, and Brother Charley warned that Bryan would now be opposed not only by the liquor interests but by those who disagreed with his interpretation of the part the religious question had played in the campaign of 1908. He also anticipated opposition by the corporations and by those seeking vengeance for his having opposed the receipt of a Carnegie grant by the University of Nebraska.⁸

Charley had taken the same position on prohibition Bryan had taken since the late 1880's and opposed it as sumptuary legislation. Moreover, were Bryan to try to dictate prohibition, Lincoln, his home, which failed to see any greatness in him and usually ignored him, would certainly oppose him. Since the Democratic Party in Nebraska had never declared in favor of either county option or prohibition, he would have been politically dead had he declared himself a prohibitionist.⁹ In July, Charley checked with Harvey Newbranch of the *Omaha World-Herald* and also with James Dahlman concerning the advisability of omitting all reference to the liquor traffic in the state platform. Newbranch would omit all reference but could not predict the actions of the Douglas County delegates, whom he deemed "a hard bunch to handle." He also suggested a short platform dealing only with nonpartisan issues but including a plank on the initiative and referendum. Tom Allen objected, predicting that a direct elections plank might raise the liquor question. Dahlman, who as mayor thoroughly controlled Omaha and was a powerful force in Douglas County, did not reply, but both Bryans knew that he was a flat-footed wet who hoped to control the state convention of 1910 and then seek the gubernatorial nomination in the primaries.¹⁰ "I wired you last night . . . that the platform was O.K. We got through very

nicely and settled the matter in committee on resolutions. The Douglas delegation was here in force and also had full delegations from the other wet counties. If there had been a contest over any plank on the liquor question, we would have been defeated easily," Charley wired Bryan on July 28, thus notifying him that the liquor control question had been put to rest temporarily but that the future boded evil.¹¹

The progressive laws passed by the Nebraska Legislature of 1909—including a nonpartisan judiciary law, the guarantee of bank deposits, the physical valuation of railroads, the popular election of assessors, a maximum oil rate which materially reduced the price of oil, and a preferential presidential primary—caused Bryan to gloat editorially over what he termed "A Remarkable Vindication." While the deposit guarantee law was being tested in the courts by national banks, he stood ready to defend it if the case reached the State Supreme Court, and Shallenberger stood ready to call the legislature into special session to remedy any defects noted.¹² When the law was approved unanimously, a happy Bryan asserted its passage "ought to start a movement to force guaranteed banks in all the states." He added:

By the way, I see that [New York Governor] Dix comes out for the income tax, as does [Ohio Governor] Harmon. It looks like our Democratic victories are going to do us some good after all. Ask Tom [Allen] what he thinks of an "achievement banquet" an March 19 [his birthday]. We may get the income tax amendment ratified by that time and the popular election of Senators submitted. These with the bank guarantee and change in the [House] rules would be enough to crow over. . . .¹³

In keeping with his plan to visit every land, Bryan journeyed to South America in the spring of 1910. Before leaving, however, he made the mistake of announcing his intention of introducing a county option plank in the Democratic state convention to be held late in July. His decision was based on a complex of impulses. As he saw it, "The right of the government to regulate the sale of liquor cannot be questioned, and the right to regulate includes the right to prohibit the saloon." The Nebraska high license law was one of the best in the nation, but a majority of the Nebraska voters favored using a larger unit, such as the county, as the area of legislation. To favor county option did not mean to favor prohibition in one's own or in any other county. Liquor led to crime, and society

should be heard when the matter of liquor regulation was considered. The liquor question had been made "acute" because the old independently owned saloon had become merely an outlet for the producers of liquor, themselves organized into a trust. The modern saloon was not only associated with vice but was constantly used to debauch politics, as in preventing the submission of the initiative and referendum to the people by the Nebraska Legislature of 1909.¹⁴ "The fight against evil is always an uphill one, and the hill is never steeper than when you fight the liquor interests," Bryan wrote Iowa's old Populist leader, James Baird Weaver.¹⁵ Indeed, in a personal letter to Henry Watterson he said that the liquor interests had exercised sufficient power against him in his 1908 campaign for the Presidency to change the result in Missouri and Indiana and to have a marked influence in Ohio and New York. These interests would be very shortsighted, he added, if they defeated county option only to force a fight on state prohibition. As for the national scene, Bryan said:

I think that we ought to have a law allowing the state to control the liquor traffic without interference from outside breweries and distilleries, and I can see no good reason why we should not compel an applicant for federal license to give notice of the application, and thus put the authorities on guard if he is trying to secure a license to sell liquor in violation of local laws.¹⁶

It may be, too, that his position as titular party leader led him to conclude that he could safely indulge in pursuit of a personal predilection. On the other hand, if he decided against a fourth nomination, then he had nothing to lose politically by engaging in a moral crusade. There is another possible conclusion. As William Howard Taft said:

Do you know, I believe that Bryan will force his nomination on the Democrats again. I believe he will either do this by advocating Prohibition, or else he will run on a Prohibition platform independent of the Democratic. But you will see that the year before the election he will organize a mammoth lecture tour and will make Prohibition the leading note in every address.¹⁷

At any rate, Watterson complained to Norman Mack that Bryan should not have any "attitude" on the liquor question, adding, "As in the matter of Railway Ownership he should have left the Temperance Question alone. The moral philosopher may say whatever is uppermost in his mind; but the Statesman—especially the party leader—must have some reserves."¹⁸

Upon his return to Nebraska, Bryan learned that his



*Gilbert M. Hitchcock,
second district Congressman, was
elected to the Senate in 1910.*

announcement that he would seek county option and his absence had strengthened the beer keg and whiskey bottle forces. It aroused those like Congressman Gilbert M. Hitchcock, who felt that county option was a first step toward state prohibition; and it antagonized those who believed as ex-Senator William V. Allen did, that "the liquor question is in no sense a political one; it is a moral, education, and religious question. . . . I am fully persuaded that you can no more legislate prohibition into the life of a man that you can legislate into him religious ideas."¹⁹ Hitchcock had managed to "live" with Bryan since he wrote him his "sting of ingratitude letter" back in 1899.²⁰ Now, although Bryan was still a power, he used his stand on prohibition to challenge Hitchcock in a bid for the United States Senate.

To free politics from domination by the liquor interests meant a fight which Bryan knew would split his party and cause all parties to take a stand. To make up for the large number of Democratic defections expected, he must enlist religious and moral elements of the community on his side. Thus, the struggle for the initiative and referendum, which

began as a political matter, blossomed into a moral crusade. To battle for a moral objective always appealed to Bryan. In his *Commoner* he sought to win the parents of the state to his cause and intimated that this new fight was in keeping with the moral leadership he had promised the Democracy in 1904. Even when close friends and supporters warned him that he was making a major political mistake, he shrugged them off. To *Commoner* staff members and others who pleaded with him to wait until public sentiment had reached his position on county option and not to jeopardize his position as a national leader, he retorted that he had made up his mind.²¹ He had been signing the pledge for almost thirty-five years and he was "deeply grieved over the sorrow and misery directly traceable to intemperance," as Mrs. Bryan put it.²² His family urged him on, and he yearned to defeat the liquor interests which had opposed him throughout twenty years of political life even though he had taken no step against them. Local option had not worked well enough, and he believed the option should be extended to the county, as in Kentucky and Missouri, and perhaps to the state, as in Kansas and Maine.²³

Waves of adulation cascaded upon Bryan after he made his pledge to fight the liquor interests. Enthusiasm arose among those who believed his oratory and political skill could provide leadership for a national temperance movement if such a movement developed out of the elections held during the few past years, when prohibition won every time it came up at the polls and state after state was going dry. He realized that his leadership of a national temperance movement would make him forever politically ineligible, and though he stressed that he was making his fight wholly within his state, he was charged with suddenly discovering the "paramount issue" he had long sought and on which he could now be elected President. Carter H. Harrison, for example, noted that "prohibition developed into a complete obsession for his latter-day mind," and Arthur F. Mullen was bitter about "the puritanical mania which Bryan had seized . . . to further his own ambitions"; others opposed his favoring temperance over all other reform issues and for raising a question which might split their party.²⁴ To those who swore to destroy him politically Bryan replied that if they did

so "my death will be a warning to the fathers and mothers of the power of this foe to the home and American life."²⁵

Mullen knew that Bryan considered running for the United States Senate until Hitchcock announced his candidacy, a fact corroborated by the Bryan brothers' correspondence. With Hitchcock's announcement, "Bryan's chances went down Salt Creek like a cockleshell. Then, suddenly, he came out for County Option." At this time, when Mullen and Shallenberger were agreed that nothing more could be done about the liquor question, Bryan sent for the former. Mullen was flattered by the invitation, for to him as to nearly every Western Democrat, Bryan was a great moral as well as political leader, and the idealistic Mullen forgave Bryan for having made an alliance of sorts with the New York Democrats in 1908. At any rate, his interview with Bryan disgusted him. As he recalled their conversation, Bryan said, "Shallenberger ought to be a brave man, and help me in this County Option fight."

Mullen said, "Why didn't you fight for it when you were a candidate in 1896, in 1900, and in 1908?"

"It wasn't an issue then."

"You could make baptism by immersion an issue. Why haven't you made this an issue?"

"Shallenberger should come to my aid," insisted Bryan.

Seeing the light, Mullen replied: "Shallenberger signed the Daylight Saloon Bill and made it law. Dahlman wouldn't enforce it. . . . I know what you're going to do. You're going to nominate Dahlman against Shallenberger."

Bryan denied this, insisted that his relations with Dahlman were personal rather than political, and revealed antagonism to the governor while demanding that he back him on county option. Mullen drove blindly back to town from Fairview, "miserable in having seen, for the first time, the treachery of a man in whom I had believed. It was not merely that I wanted Shallenberger to be governor again. The hurt went far deeper than that. I had seen a god fling himself down from the altar before which men were pleading for his aid against the injustice of an oppressing world."²⁶

The whole issue was inflamed by the fact that the liquor

interests, now consolidated into several large corporations, ran headlong into the relatively new (1893) temperance organization, the Anti-Saloon League, which found most of its strength in the Protestant churches and, since 1897, had made itself felt as a political force in Nebraska. The superintendent of the Nebraska League, the Reverend John B. Carns, pastor of the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church of Grand Island, pushed mightily for county option. The Slocumb law, in effect since 1881, permitted only cities and towns to vote on the saloon question. Were county option effective, he, like Bryan, would pit the power of the state's rural vote against interests represented in Nebraska's 1,100 licensed saloons, forty breweries, three distilleries, extensive out-of-state liquor dealings, German, Swedish, Bohemian and wet native elements of the population, and the very wet Personal Liberty League, whose hundred-odd foreign language newspapers were liberally subsidized by the liquor interests.²⁷

The Nebraska Republicans were about two-thirds dry and one-third wet, Nebraska Democrats about two-thirds wet and one-third dry. Wet Democrats, angered over Shallenberger's signing of the daylight saloon law, were prevented from transferring their allegiance to the Republican Party when the latter endorsed county option in their insurgent-controlled state convention, which overruled Victor Rosewater on all points, as did the Populists, who bolted the leadership of W. V. Allen.²⁸ Their battle in the Democratic convention, which would meet in Grand Island on July 25, would be over the issue of county option and over how to surmount Bryan's prestige, oratorical power, and parliamentary skill.

The failure of the legislative session of 1910 to submit a constitutional amendment providing for the initiative and referendum strengthened Bryan's demand for county option, which could be obtained by popular vote. Late in April he sent a letter to each member of the legislature asking him to wire collect how he would vote on the initiative and referendum if a special session were called. Were a majority to favor direct legislation, he was certain that Governor Shallenberger would call a special session. If not, there was nothing left for the Democratic party to do but declare itself for both direct

elections and county option in the state platform.²⁹ To obtain these objectives and to overcome the "misrepresentation" he said he was subjected to in many newspapers, he took his case to the people. When barred from speaking in the courthouse in Nebraska City, he hired a hall and stressed the fact that the attempt to prevent his speaking disclosed the character of the opposition to the initiative and referendum, adding:

Those who stand back of the liquor traffic are very short sighted when they oppose the initiative and referendum. They say they are afraid that if the initiative and referendum are incorporated in our organic law the question of county option will be presented. The attitude of the saloon interests is therefore, that they are so opposed to county option that they are not willing that the people shall have the right to vote upon this question or any other question. . . . They thus make the liquor question a paramount issue.³⁰

In sending Brother Charley suggestions for the state platform, Bryan originally thought that county option could be omitted, since it had never been submitted to the voters, "but I *insist* upon the initiative and referendum. . . . A Democrat who does not believe in the right of the people to have what they want is not fit to be a supreme judge—neither is a man who will accept a nomination from a convention in which the liquor interests can turn down the proposition." Again, he was willing to ignore the whole liquor question "this year," but "*if any thing is said*—we ought to endorse county option. Don't allow any endorsement of 'personal liberty' or any criticism of 'sumptuary legislation.' If they want to drag the liquor question in, make them state it boldly and then we can make the fight in the open."³¹ In turn, Charley strengthened him in his determination not to support Dahlman if the latter were nominated.³² "It is the biggest fight I have ever entered upon," Bryan replied, "and I do not know how it will end but I believe I am right and that is enough."³³

On July 9, in a hot, four-hour session Bryan dictated to the Lancaster County convention a county option plank, instructed the delegation to work for it at Grand Island, and delivered a fiery speech in which he denounced the liquor interests for opposing him in 1908, for "ganging up" on the Democratic ticket in Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri, as well as in Nebraska. He would not make peace with the brewers of Omaha, who had prevented direct legislation from

being enacted; nor would he represent his county in the state convention if it did not adopt county option, saying, "I would much rather stay at home than to represent you as your delegate while you trailed along at the tail of a brewery procession." Then, using the Democratic campaign of 1904 as an example, he urged a fight for principle rather than for success. Although two delegates to Grand Island resigned, he won his point by 134 to 30.³⁴ However, his efforts failed as far as the state organization was concerned, for at a meeting on July 12 of the state central committee, the selection of C. J. Smyth as temporary chairman of the state convention was a victory for the liquor forces. Those in control were determined to humiliate Bryan, some saying that they did not care whether he remained in the party or not, while Hitchcock asserted that the platform would deal with national rather than state issues.³⁵ Bryan followers harangued crowds assembled in Grand Island on convention eve, but their converts were few and his ideas were tolerated rather than welcomed.

When Bryan, in company with all but two of the fifty-nine men in the Lancaster County delegation, all of whom complied with his order to take off their Shallenberger badges, entered the huge, hot tent in which the convention was held, he was greeted by mingled cheers and catcalls, the latter the first he had ever received in a Nebraska convention. Many old-time friends, Populists as well as Democrats, conspicuously refused to go anywhere near him. Henceforth, his mood can be best described as "wrathful." While the chairman of the convention was friendly to him, temporary chairman Smyth, his devoted friend, opened by sadly noting that it might be necessary for many to stop following his leadership.³⁶ Congressman Hitchcock, who favored city and town option until the initiative and referendum gave the people a chance to vote for a change, lighted the fireworks by trying to muzzle Bryan with a resolution prohibiting the making of speeches on platform planks unless made as part of the majority or minority reports of the committee on resolutions. Such a resolution would also prevent Metcalfe from presenting a compromise resolution which favored Shallenberger rather than Dahlman for governor, and Bryan

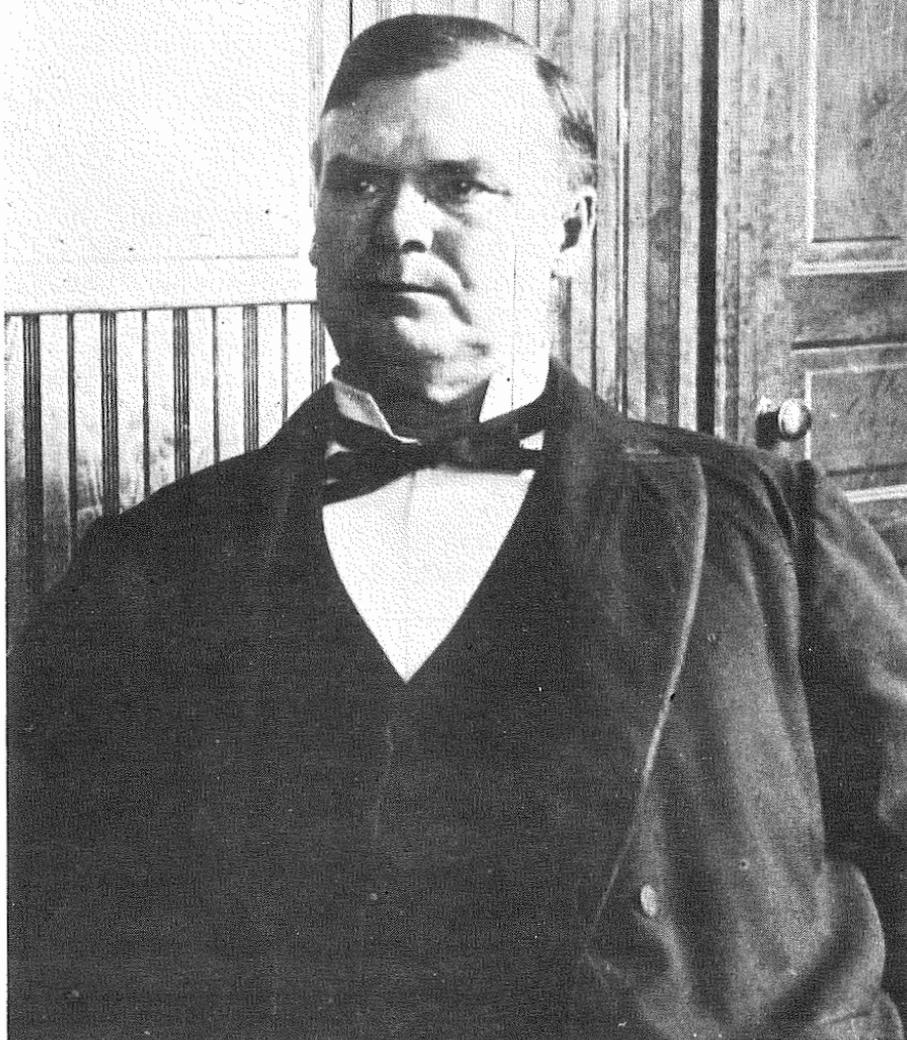
instantly tried to introduce a modifying amendment that would enable him and Metcalfe to speak before the reports were made. On roll call he lost by 465 to 394. Amidst charges that he wished to dictate, Bryan also lost his motion to permit the offering of resolutions after the platform had been adopted by the committee on resolutions. To criticism that he had not taken a stand favoring county option during the legislative session of 1909, he replied simply that county option was not an issue then, and to those who reminded him that he had said nothing against the Slocumb Law for twenty years he replied that for twenty years he had honestly and sincerely believed that a high license system was adequate enough. Then he lashed out against the *World-Herald*, which he said was unneutral (as was his own *Commoner*) and a party to the misrepresentation being undertaken by its owner, Hitchcock. He jabbed at Shallenberger for not having called the legislature into special session in 1909 to vote on the initiative and referendum (when he himself had been told by Brother Charley that the prospects for the passage of such a bill were dim).³⁷

Three resolutions on the liquor question were reported by the eight men, including Bryan, who formed the committee on resolutions: (1) Dahlman's wet plank against county option; (2) Bryan's "We favor county option as the best method of dealing with the liquor question"; and (3) Shallenberger's proposal to endorse the 8 o'clock closing law. Metcalf could not introduce his compromise plank, and Shallenberger's plank stating that he would not veto a county option bill if one was passed helped Bryan little. Since Shallenberger opposed county option, he could be charged with playing bad politics as well as revealing poor statesmanship. Night fell before the committee reports were ready, and Bryan obtained an opportunity to speak on his minority report.

In opening for the majority, William D. Oldham said that he was sorry that Bryan had left the great old principles of Democracy to advocate an outside issue: "I am to be followed by him who, as an orator, I am unworthy to loosen the strings on his shoes, but I warn you to beware of the wooden horse he is trying to bring into the Democratic party."

Waving down to silence followers who would cheer him and thus make up for the defeat he had received on the first roll call and for other slights, Bryan originally adopted a conciliatory attitude. Knowing that the party had bid for the support of the liquor element since 1867 and that he himself accepted a pro-liquor party policy for twenty years, he failed from the beginning to carry his audience with him. His English was pure, his diction superb; he built short, simple sentences into crashing climaxes. Yet he lacked hope and sounded a note of defeat and gloom that spread darkness upon the faces of his hearers. Neither his logic nor his rhetoric, now full of the pet phrases of the professional prohibitionist, broke the chain of instructions that bound the majority of the delegates against him. He asserted that he desired neither to disturb party harmony nor to dictate. He was hurt by the severance of old political friendships and did not relish performing this new "duty." It was apparent to him, moreover, that "I am to be turned down at home, and that fact is to be used as a taunt whenever I go up and down the country." With a hint of steel in his voice, he then asserted that he had no apology to make for his attitude toward the brewers; rather he should apologize to the fathers and mothers of the state for his having remained silent for so long. His hearers represented only the few who had attended the county conventions, and he meant to take his fight beyond them to the people of the state. "County option is not only expedient," he added, "but is right. This is a moral question. There is but one side to a moral question. Which do you take?" With tones of entreaty he urged those who had supported him in the past to support him still. With lower jaw thrust out and great determination in his voice he concluded that he would never sound a retreat, that if the standard were to be given to the enemy it must be given by hands other than his.³⁸

For two hours, with about seven thousand delegates and spectators wilting in an intense and sickening heat, Bryan had again revealed his abundant physical and speaking powers. However, early on July 26 his plank lost on roll call by 647 to 198, a much worse defeat than that by which he had been denied the right to speak the day before. His attempt to make Democrats drink water had failed dismally. When Dahlman's



Ex-Senator William V. Allen contended that the "liquor question" was non-political.

wet plank also lost, 638 to 202, the victory went to Shallenberger, by 710 to 163, with few realizing that he had in essence shunted the burden of decision from the delegates to the members of the state legislature.

The only tasks of the convention were to write a platform and select a new state central committee. Except for the planks endorsing Shallenberger and the daylight saloon closing law, the platform was a progressive document that mirrored Bryan's views on all major issues. It paid fealty to the principles of Thomas Jefferson; endorsed the national platform of 1908 and state platform of 1909; opposed the

Payne-Aldrich tariff, ship subsidies, trusts; and favored the conservation of natural resources. On the strictly state level it favored biennial elections, nonpartisan elections for judges and for the directors of public institutions, and home rule for first class cities. In addition, all candidates were pledged "not to accept contributions from any railroad or other corporation, trust, brewery, distillery, or saloon, anti-saloon organization, or from any person or association pecuniarily or prejudicially interested in securing or defeating legislation." Unhappy over the loss of county option, Bryan was nevertheless pleased that planks favoring the initiative and referendum were adopted by both the Democratic and Republican conventions.³⁹

The greatest personal involvement in this bitterly personal contest was between Bryan and Dahlman. Mayor Jim had practically discovered Bryan back in 1887. He had filled every important local and state party post and served as national committeeman, and he had been staunch in each case to Bryan. By putting principle before personalities, Bryan was in the unenviable position of opposing a gubernatorial aspirant of his party and a close friend, and the battle was bound to cut deep and leave permanent scars.

The Grand Island convention marked two turning points in the history of the Nebraska Democracy. For the first time the party had faced a straight-out fight over the liquor question. His first defeat in a Democratic convention since 1893 also ended Bryan's leadership of the party in his own state, and his alienation of both Shallenberger and Dahlman would hurt him badly *if* he were going to be a presidential candidate in 1912.⁴⁰ Yet, for some time he straddled the fence by saying that both the temperance people and the brewers were extremists and that the liquor question should be settled by the largest possible governmental unit. However, given a choice between the temperance and the liquor extremists, he preferred the former.⁴¹ Hitchcock commended his courage and honesty and hoped the issue would be settled in November, for it would be embarrassing if it entered the campaign of 1912. He spoke for many, too, when he alluded to Bryan's "stirring up of a frantic strife over a peanut issue" and decried fighting like cats and dogs to decide whether the prohibition unit should be the city and township or the

county, when in every other state the people were studying and debating great national issues that affected the life and future of the Republic.⁴²

The division Bryan had forced in the Grand Island convention continued during the primaries of August and the November elections. The 1909 change from closed to open primaries enabled wet Republicans coached by the liquor interests to invade the Democratic primaries in such large numbers, about 15,000, that Dahlman beat Shallenberger by 304 votes out of the 54,878 cast. Shallenberger questioned the vote in Douglas County. When a recount showed a slight change in favor of Dahlman, he conceded.⁴³ To Dahlman's credit he made an open race, accepting county option as the paramount issue and said Bryan had seized the "wrong end of a red-hot poker" and that in the election he would get the biggest "trimming" Nebraska or any other state had witnessed in several decades. Believing that most Nebraska voters were wet, he hunted wet votes regardless of party and said that as governor he would veto a county option bill or a bill repealing the Slocumb Law. He was so sure of his victory that he invited the voters of the state to a barbeque and free beer party and dance to be held on the capital grounds in Lincoln to celebrate his inauguration.⁴⁴ Bryan met his challenge frankly by stating that he would vote for all the Democratic candidates except Dahlman and asked Brother Charley to suggest to the Anti-Saloon League people that they print Dahlman's free beer speech and circulate it at church doors everywhere on the Sunday before election.⁴⁵ He was amused, too, by the fact that the Republican state press played up what he said against Dahlman but slighted his discussion of national issues while the *World-Herald* emphasized what he said on national issues but slighted what he said about Dahlman.⁴⁶

After stumping in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois in behalf of Democratic candidates in the congressional elections, Bryan returned to Nebraska to keep his promise. In his absence Brother Charley obeyed his injunction to keep in touch with Nebraska's "Dry Democrats" and to "publish everything they send."⁴⁷ Even during his absence, therefore, he subjected Dahlman to a severe

excoriation in the *Commoner*, which favored printing objections to him sent by the pastors of Nebraska's Protestant churches.⁴⁸

In Lincoln on October 31, with the election a week away, Bryan made his first speech in the Nebraska campaign. After reviewing the national issues and accusing Roosevelt of filling his Osawatomie, Kansas, speech with "doctrines from the Democratic platform of olden days," he stated that he would continue his campaign against liquor in the years to come, whether county option won or lost in Nebraska. He read a carefully prepared statement on the state issues in which he criticized the Republicans for not meeting these issues and the Democrats for making a local issue the supreme question when Democratic victory was in the air on the national scene.

Dahlman, he continued, had secured a majority in the open primary by the aid of wet Republicans. He had not obtained a majority of the Democratic votes cast. Therefore while legally entitled to the nomination he lacked the moral right to claim Democratic support:

I shall neither speak for Mr. Dahlman nor vote for him. I hope to see him defeated by a majority so overwhelming as to warn the brewers, distillers and liquor dealers to retire from Nebraska politics and allow people to act upon the liquor question as they do upon other questions.

But whether Mr. Dahlman is elected or defeated I shall continue my protest against the domination of our party by the liquor interests. I shall contribute whatever assistance I can to the effort which will be made to put an end to the spree upon which our party seems to have embarked. I am not willing that the party shall die of delirium tremens.⁴⁹

Bryan thus broadened his fight from state to national scale and promised that an appeal would be made "to the conscience and moral sense of the people" to wipe out the liquor interests.

While Shallenberger loyally supported Dahlman, Hitchcock, and the entire state ticket, Bryan kept his promise to stump the state for every one on his ticket except Dahlman. Since the state committee would not "date" him, he chose strategic spots—Holdrege, Arapahoe, Beatrice, Trenton, Culbertson, and Lexington—hired the halls himself, and paid all of his expenses. He told his hearers:

The liquor business is on the defensive; its representatives are, for the most part, lawless themselves and in league with lawlessness. They are in partnership with the gambling hell and the brothel. They are the most corrupt and corrupting influence in politics, and I shall not, by voice or vote, aid them in establishing a reign of terror in this state.⁵⁰

While he did not openly advocate the election of a Republican governor, he made it clear that Dahlman's position on the liquor question made it impossible for any sincere temperance man to vote for him. As he said, the main question involved was whether the Democratic Party would become the saloon party in the state and nation and thereby lose the best element of its membership and its power for future battles in the people's interest.⁵¹ It remains clear, however, that the three-time standard bearer of his party had publicly bolted that party. Although he savagely denied that he would bolt the state convention if it did not declare for county option, there is no doubt that his campaign effectively spiked Dahlman's ambitions. Dahlman had the machine vote; Bryan still had power with the people, with the result that Dahlman lost by about 16,000 votes. There was no actual break in the Bryan-Dahlman friendship, but the old friendliness was never completely restored.⁵² Moreover, while Bryan advocated the election of Democrats to the state legislature, he gave the preference to a dry Republican over a wet Democratic opponent if the former supported the initiative and referendum and the latter did not.⁵³ Yet when Hitchcock received the preference vote for senator by a resounding 25,000 votes, tantamount to his election by a fusion of Democrats, Populists, and Insurgent Republicans, Bryan violated his earlier threat to oppose all those who would not join him in committing their part to county option, congratulated the man he had called "a tool of the brewers," and promised him full support toward election.⁵⁴ As if to repay him for his ingratitude to Dahlman, Hitchcock as senator promised more trouble for Bryan in the future than Dahlman ever would have.

The November elections largely bore out Bryan's prediction that Democratic victory was in the air. The American people voted their lack of confidence in the Republican party by swelling the number of Democrats in the U. S. Senate to

forty, giving the Democrats control of the House of Representatives for the first time in sixteen years, and by replacing many Republican conservatives with Insurgents. George Norris's victory in March in emasculating the speaker's powers promised more democratic procedures in the House; with Champ Clark as speaker and a Democratic-Insurgent coalition, the dawn of progressivism was evident. The return of Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey to the Democratic fold revealed a tremendous change from 1908 in the East, as did the return of the border states of Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri. While Taft lost his home state and neighboring Indiana and the Boise Penrose machine held on to the Pennsylvania governorship by a mere 30,000 votes, the election of such Democratic governors as Woodrow Wilson, Eugene N. Foss, Simeon Baldwin, and Judson Harmon rehabilitated their party in the eyes of the country and also provided men with stature enough to challenge Bryan's leadership. John Kern's victory over Albert J. Beveridge in Indiana, accomplished with the aid of Bryan and Alton B. Parker, had added a strong Bryanite to the Senate.

Although a Republican, Chester H. Aldrich, the new governor of Nebraska, had handily carried the rest of the state ticket with him, he faced a Democratic legislature. In Washington, Nebraska was represented by three Democrats and three Republicans. According to Hitchcock the result in Nebraska was "a case of mixed pickles" in which the legislature was foredoomed to a cat-and-dog fight over submission of an initiative and referendum amendment; no matter which way it settled the issue, the question of county option would be raised again.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Aldrich was a pronounced county optionist strongly backed by the Anti-Saloon League, and it was believed that there were enough county option Democrats and Republicans in the legislature to insure the passage of a bill at the next session.⁵⁶ Instead, in 1911 the Democrats refused to comply with Aldrich's demand for a county option law and submitted an amendment to the constitution providing for the initiative and referendum.

Charles Willis Thompson noted that Bryan spent the last

fifteen years before his death "in such a fierce fight in behalf of prohibition as to obliterate everything else" and that he was "in the mind of the West the whole front of prohibition politics."⁵⁷ A reporter's hyperbole may be excused. A more reasonable conclusion on Bryan's part in the campaign of 1910 would be that, although he was the only nationally known political figure to take up prohibition at the time and to see it through to the end to the passage of the 18th Amendment and to its enforcement in 1919, he by no means absorbed himself in it completely. He continued his Chautauqua work and his newspaper, the *Commoner*. He may have been Wilson's Warwick in the Baltimore convention of 1912, served more than two years as the President's tendentious secretary of state, held what amounted to a veto power over Wilson's domestic reform program during those years, and could not be entirely laughed away as a political power even as late as 1920. Hitchcock, John H. Morehead, Mullen, and their anti-Bryan following generally controlled Nebraska for the two decades following 1910, but its people listened to Bryan in 1916, when Prohibition had finally become a burning national issue, and voted dry. Moreover, Brother Charley was destined to win back control of the state, and, as governor for several terms in the 1920's and 1930's, again make the Bryan name a potent factor in Nebraska politics.⁵⁸

NOTES

1. The national Anti-Saloon League was started by Howard Hyde Russell and became a political force through his efforts and those of Purley A. Baker. Its philosopher and propagandizer for two generations was Ernest H. Cherrington; its leader in legislative battles Edwin C. Dinwiddie; its major spokesman in Bryan's day Wayne B. Wheeler and Bishop James Cannon. See Ernest H. Cherrington, *The Evolution of Prohibition* (New York, 1920); Virginius Dabney, *Dry Messiah: The Life of Bishop Cannon* (New York, 1949); Justin Steuart, *An Uncensored Biography of Wayne B. Wheeler* (New York, 1928); Peter Odegard, *Pressure Politics: The Story of the Anti-Saloon League* (New York, 1928); Ferdinand C. Iglehart, *King Alcohol Dethroned* (Westerville, Ohio, 1919); D. Leigh Colvin, *Prohibition in the United States: A History of the Prohibition Party and of the Prohibition Movement* (New York, 1926).

2. Dewey E. Grantham, Jr. "Prohibition and the Progressive Movement in the South" (Unpublished MSS, courtesy Dr. Grantham).

3. Wayne C. Williams, *William Jennings Bryan* (New York, 1936), 311-312.
4. Letters of March 30, 31, 1909, Silas Bryan Papers. The writer is indebted to the late Silas Bryan, son of Charles Bryan, for use of the unpublished correspondence between his father and uncle.
5. *Omaha World-Herald*, May 18, July 14, 1909.
6. Letter of April 6, 1909, Silas Bryan Papers; Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People* (3 vols., Chicago, 1931), I, 839-840; James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1955), 254.
7. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 10, 1909; Arthur F. Mullen, *Western Democrat* (New York, 1940), 140-142.
8. In March Bryan had appeared before the state legislature and protested against the acceptance by the University of Nebraska of Carnegie's pension fund for retired professors on the ground that Carnegie's money was "tainted." By an exceedingly slim margin, the legislators barred acceptance. *The Independent*, March 18, 1909.
9. Mullen, *Western Democrat*, 137-138.
10. Charles Bryan to William Bryan, July 23, 1909, Silas Bryan Papers.
11. *Ibid.*
12. William Bryan to Charles Bryan, July 9, 1909, *ibid.*
13. William Bryan to Charles Bryan, n.d., *ibid.* Shallenberger, Judge I. L. Albert, and Arthur Mullen had drafted the bank guarantee law. No bank failures occurred in Nebraska from 1911 to 1919, when the Republicans amended it. Mullen gave great credit to Shallenberger, who served six terms in Congress between 1915 and 1935, for the passage of the Federal Bank Deposit Guarantee Law, which in many ways duplicated the original Nebraska law. Mullen, *Western Democrat*, 147-150.
14. *Omaha World-Herald*, February 12, 13, 14, 1910.
15. Letter of September 22, 1910, cited in Paul Glad *The Trumpet Soundeth* (Lincoln, 1960), 106.
16. Bryan to Watterson, May 13, 1910, Silas Bryan Papers.
17. Archibald Willingham Butt, *Taft and Roosevelt: the Intimate Letters of Archie Butt, Military Aide* (2 vols., New York, 1930), I, 286 (Butt to "Dear Clara," February 21, 1910).
18. Watterson to Mack, May 28, 1910, Henry Watterson Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.
19. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 19, 1909.
20. See the writer's "A Tempest in a Teapot?—Governor Poynter's Appointment of William V. Allen to the United States Senate," *Nebraska History*, 38 (June 1957), 155-163.
21. *Commoner* (Lincoln, Nebraska) February 18, 1910; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 845. Bryan was one of the few leading national figures to sponsor prohibition. Roosevelt had opposed it on at least three occasions during his public life, in 1884, 1905, and 1908. When asked about his attitude on the liquor question in July 1910, Woodrow Wilson stated that "the question is outside of politics. I believe in Home rule, and that the issue should be settled by local option in each community." Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters* (8 vols., Garden City, New York, 1927-1939), II, 152, III, 63-64; Willis F. Johnson, *George Harvey, "A Passionate Patriot"* (Boston, 1929), 147.

22. William Jennings Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Philadelphia, 1925), 290. Bryan asked all prospective employees of the *Commoner* if they drank liquor. See D. Finch, Jr., to Bryan, March 25, 1901, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

23. Bryan, *Memoirs*, 290-291.

24. Carter Henry Harrison, *Stormy Years* (Indianapolis, 1935), 258; Mullen, *Western Democrat*, 236. See also J. C. Long, *Bryan, The Great Commoner* (New York, 1928), 211-212; Sheldon, *Nebraska I, 844-845*; Charles Willis Thompson, *Presidents I've Known and Two Near Presidents* (Indianapolis, 1929), 54-55.

25. *Commoner*, July 15, August 5, 12, 1910; Josephus Daniels, "Behind the Scenes with William Jennings Bryan," Daniels Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

26. *Western Democrat*, 143-144.

27. Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 842-844; Robert E. Wenter, "The Anti-Saloon League in Nebraska Politics, 1898-1910," *Nebraska History*, 52 (Fall 1971), 267-292.

28. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 26, 27, 1910.

29. *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), April 29, 1910.

30. *Ibid.*, April 16, 17, 1910.

31. William Bryan to Charles Bryan, n.d., Silas Bryan Papers; see also Bryan to Hatfield, January 14, 1910, *ibid.*

32. Charles Bryan to William Bryan, September 1, 1910, *ibid.*

33. William Bryan to Charles Bryan, n.d., *ibid.*

34. *Nebraska State Journal*, July 10, 1910; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 10, 11, 1910.

35. *Nebraska State Journal*, July 12, 1910.

36. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 27, 1910.

37. Charles Bryan to William Bryan, November 20, 27, 1909, Silas Bryan Papers; *Omaha World-Herald*, July 10, 13, 16, 27, 1910; *Nebraska State Journal*, July 27, 1910.

38. *Nebraska State Journal*, *Omaha World Herald*, July 27, 29, 1910; J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska* (3 vols., Lincoln, 1910-1920), III, 280-281.

39. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 27, 29, 1910.

40. Mullen, *Western Democrat*, 144; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 847.

41. *Commoner*, April 7, 1911.

42. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 21, October 22, 1910.

43. *Ibid.*, September 17, 1910; Editorial, "Mr. Bryan as an Insurgent," *The Independent*, 69 (September 29, 1910), 717-718; Mullen, *Western Democrat*, 144; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 848.

44. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 22, 1910; Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 849.

45. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 21, 1910; William Bryan to Charles Bryan, November 1, 1910, Silas Bryan Papers.

46. William Bryan to Charles Bryan, November 2, 1910, Silas Bryan Papers.

47. *Ibid.*, n.d.; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 17, 1910.

48. *Omaha World-Herald*, October 22, 1910.

49. *Ibid.*, September 6, November 1, 1910; *Nebraska State Journal*, November 1, 1910.

50. *Omaha World-Herald*, November 3, 4, 1910.
51. Sheldon, *Nebraska*, I, 849-850.
52. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 25, September 5, 1910; Fred Carey, *Mayor Jim; The Life of James C. Dahlman* (Omaha, 1930), 119-120.
53. William Bryan to Charles Bryan, n.d., Silas Bryan Papers.
54. *Commoner*, February 18, March 7, August 26, 1910; Robert Foster Patterson, "Gilbert M. Hitchcock: A Story of Two Careers," reprint in *Nebraska State Historical Society from University of Colorado Studies*, 26 (November 1940), 8-9; Mullen, *Western Democrat*, 143-145.
55. *Omaha World-Herald*, November 9, 13, 1910; see also *New York Times*, November 9, 1910 (1:3 and 2:5) and November 10, 1910 (2:2).
56. Instead of passing such a law, however, the legislature of 1911 settled for a constitutional amendment providing for the initiative and referendum.
57. *Presidents I've Known*, 55.
58. See Larry G. Osnes, "Charles W. Bryan: 'His Brother's Keeper,'" *Nebraska History*, 48 (Spring 1967), 45-67; and "Charles Wayland Bryan: Independent Democrat," (unpublished master's degree thesis, Wayne State College, Wayne, Nebraska, 1965).